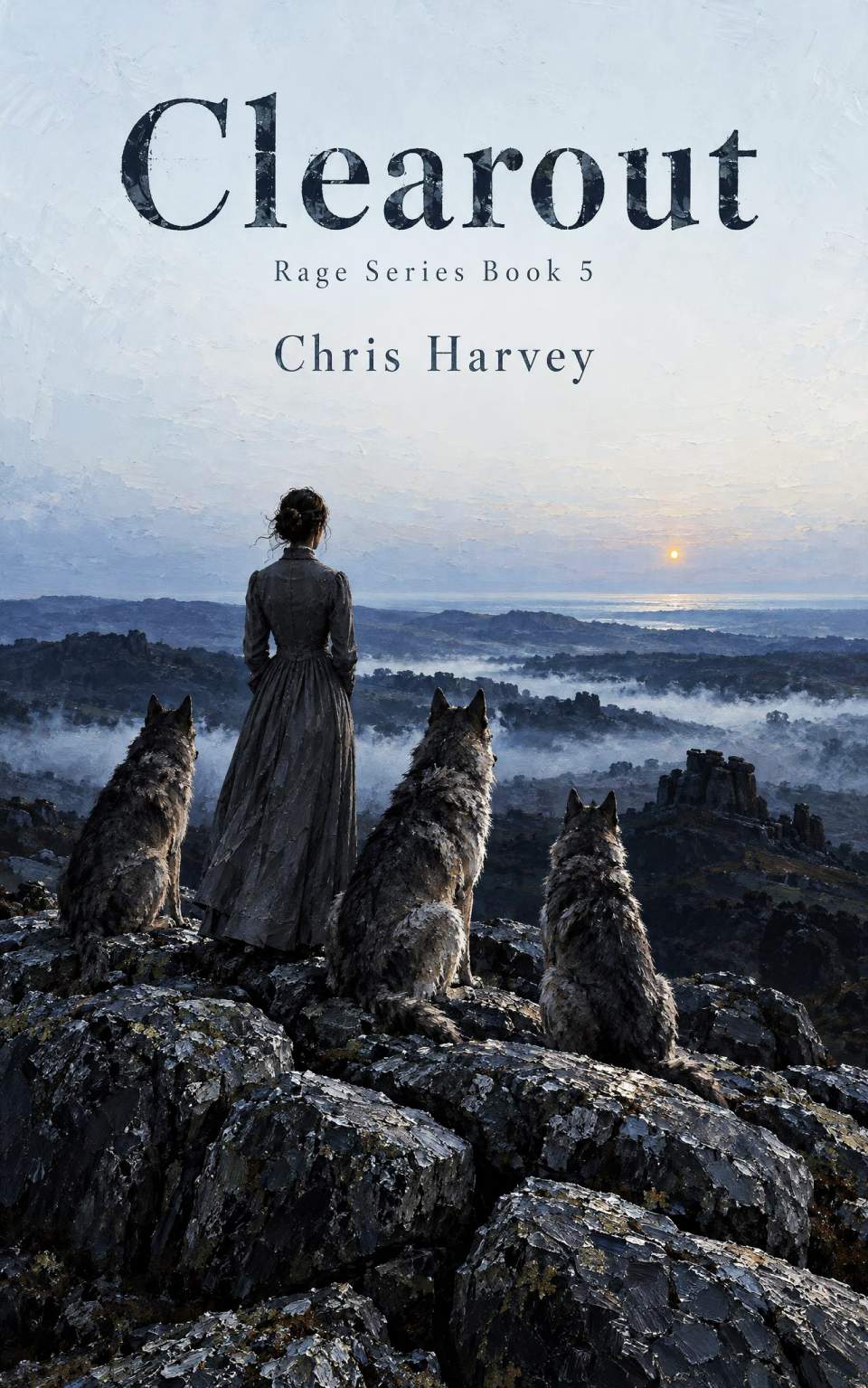
Clearout

Rage Series Book 5

Chris Harvey



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Chris Harvey



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Published by AniaAI

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Chapter 1 – *The Prophecy*

Thurs. 6 April 2028. Bailey's, back room, 6.15 p.m. Ania at the window, cup in both hands. Nobody had asked her anything. She said: "There shall come from the stars an unseen light. And that light shall bring forth changes in man. But death shall be necessary first." Then she drank her tea. Wrote it down. Did not ask.

Jono had written it down because he wrote everything down, and because nobody else in the room had looked up.

Tan had been on the phone to Singapore. Vicky had been counting chairs. Richard had been on his knees by the fireplace with a spirit level, checking a hearth he had already checked twice. Chris had been tuning a guitar in the corner with his bad hand, head down over the strings, listening for something under the note the way he always listened.

Only Jono had been watching the window. And Ania had said it to the glass, every word the same length, as if she were reading the time. Then she drank her tea, which she never did, and set the cup down square on the saucer.

He had known her since he was a baby in a knitted hat, and in fifty-five years he had never once got a straight answer by asking. So he had not asked.

That was three hours ago. He had not stopped thinking about it since.

* * *

Station Square at nine o'clock on the night Bailey's opened was so full you could not see the ground.

A year ago, almost to the week, Jono had stood on a bollard by the bus shelter and talked to five thousand people about finishing things. Behind him, then, there had been a burned-out shell and a hoarding that said COMING 20 with the last two numbers missing.

Now there was this. Four storeys of pale brick on the corner where the Albion had stood, with a slate roof and tall windows. Tan had wanted glass. Richard had drawn brick. They had argued for a fortnight, until Tan rang back and said, *Very well. Brick. But big windows.* So the windows were big, and lit gold, all four floors, and the light lay across the square in long panels, over the crowd and the wet stones, all the way to the other side, where the long oak workshop stood with its doors open and its chimney smoking.

Fred had said he would keep the forge going until the last guest went home, and Fred did what he said. Under the noise you could hear it: the hammer, steady, from across the square.

Two buildings, facing each other. One for making things. One for sitting afterwards.

The sign over the door said **BAILEY'S** in plain gold letters, and under it, smaller: *Station Square. Again.*

"Chris told me," Tan had said earlier, standing under it with his hands behind his back. "The first night we ate together. A public bar on a station square, a long time ago, and a young tram conductor sitting in the window." He shrugged, a small Singaporean shrug. "I do not believe in ghosts, Jono. But I believe in names. A name is a promise you make to the people who come after."

Jono had not told him that the old Bailey's had stood on the other side of the square, where the forge was now. He thought Tan probably knew. He thought Tan had built it opposite on purpose, so that the two could look at each other across the stones, the old name and the new one, and keep each other honest.

* * *

Ania's Rage went on at a quarter past nine.

There was no stage. *A public bar has a corner*, Richard said, *and you play in the corner*. So they played by the fireplace, under a big framed photograph of the square in about 1900, with a tram in it: a drummer from Brixham who mended nets in the daytime, a bass player who taught maths in a cardigan, Chris on a stool because his back would not let him stand for an hour any more, and Ania.

Jono still did not know how to describe what she did. She stood very straight in her grey costume with her hands at her sides and set each word down in the air, one after another, like somebody laying a table. It should have sounded like a station announcement. Instead a room full of people went quiet and leaned forward, as if somebody had opened a window in a house they had not known was stuffy.

Chris played under her, not showing off. Sixty-six, with a stroke behind him and a hand he had taught to do the work anyway. Every so often he looked up from the strings, not at the crowd but along it. Platform game. Jono had seen him do it at funerals.

The Lightwave men were along the far wall in their good jackets. Mrs Hellier was in her wheelchair by the radiator, because Jono had promised her granddaughter he'd get her home by eleven. Fred had come across from the forge in his apron, black to the elbows, and stood at the bar with a lemonade while Biscuit lay across his boots.

Jono stood in the doorway to the hall with a pint he had not touched. He had done three calls that evening, a bath and two bedtimes, and he had told himself that tonight he was a guest. He had left the lanyard in the car.

But you do not stop. Exits: front door to the square, side door to the hall, the fire door at the back of the back room onto the yard by the station car park. Staff: eight, in waistcoats, two he'd known

since pushchairs. A table of men from the council laughing too loudly and watching the door.

And a man in the window.

* * *

He sat at the small table in the front window of the public bar, the best seat for the square and the worst for the band. He had his back to the music and his face to the glass, and he was looking out at the station and the forge the way you look at a place you have not seen for a very long time, checking it against a memory.

About thirty. Lean, dark-haired, plain dark jacket, white shirt open at the neck. Nobody Jono knew, and Jono knew most of Paignton under sixty by sight and the rest by their mothers. A cup of tea in front of him, untouched.

As Jono watched, he put one hand flat on the table and turned the cup a quarter turn on its saucer, by the handle, the way you turn a dial to find a station.

Jono had seen that done before, a thousand times, and could not place it. Then the song ended, and in the clapping a man at the far end of the bar put down a glass.

* * *

It was the glass he would come back to, at three in the morning at his kitchen table, going through it frame by frame.

Lime and soda. On opening night, with the drinks half-price. A man in his forties in a dark jacket, with a face you would forget before you reached the end of the street. Twenty minutes at the bar and he had not once looked at the band. He put the glass down square, carefully, the way you do when you will need both hands.

Then he started along the bar towards the window. Not quickly. People were moving everywhere between songs, and he moved with

them. *Sorry. Excuse me.* Jono watched him the way you watch a car you think is going too fast, before you know why.

Ania had started the next song. Chris was bent over his guitar.

The man reached the end of the bar, ten feet from the window table. The young man there was still looking out at Station Square, with his hand flat beside his cup.

The man from the bar put his right hand inside his jacket.

* * *

People ask afterwards how you knew. Jono had been asked it by sergeants and solicitors and once by a coroner, and he had never had a good answer.

You don't know. Your body knows, a second before you do, and you find out what it knew by watching what it does.

It put the pint down on the nearest table without spilling it. It went sideways through a gap between two girls from the council, the way you go down a ward at night, saying *Excuse me* in a perfectly ordinary voice. And then it was behind the man, closer than a stranger stands, and its left hand had closed round his right wrist inside the jacket, on something hard and square.

Grip. Trigger guard. Jono did not let himself think the word.

The man turned from the hips, low and fast, a move Jono had felt once before, on a slipway in a storm with the sea coming over. It should have broken the grip. It didn't. Jono was fifty-five and lifted people out of baths for a living. He held on, put his forearm across the back of the man's neck the way they had taught him in 1991 at Middlemoor, and drove him down onto the edge of the bar.

The gun went off inside the jacket, pointed at the floor. A flat hard crack, smaller than in films, a smell of burning, and a long splintering sound from the panelling under the bar.

For one second nobody in Bailey's did anything at all.

Then everybody did.

* * *

A glass went, then a table, then the noise a crowd makes when it understands all at once. Maureen was on her feet with her handbag held up like a shield. Fred was over the bar. Biscuit was barking, high and furious.

The man used the edge of the bar, pushed off, and Jono's grip slid on the cloth and found nothing. He did not run for the front door, where everybody else was going. Jono would write that down later. He went the other way, through the side door, through the hall, low and quiet, like somebody who had studied the plans.

Jono went after him. The back room, chairs going over. The fire door open, the alarm starting its long wail. Out into the yard: wet tarmac, wheelie bins, the kitchen light, and beyond it the dark station car park and the footbridge over the line.

Nobody.

He stood in the rain with his chest going, and listened. A car door, somewhere towards the Torquay road. An engine starting, not revving. Starting the way an ordinary man starts an ordinary car on an ordinary night, and pulling away.

He thought of a grey hatchback, five or six years old, the most ordinary car in England, and did not let himself think it all the way.

Across the square, the hammer had stopped.

* * *

The police were there in six minutes. Jono timed it.

The sergeant was a calm woman in her thirties with a Plymouth voice. She listened to him for three minutes under the gold sign without interrupting, then said, "You were job."

"Long time ago."

"Not that long," she said, looked at his hands, and sent a constable for tea.

They cleared the bar and took names at the door. A lad in a white suit knelt by the splintered panel with a torch. Jono pointed at the glass on the bar, and the lad bagged it and said, "Lime and soda?" Jono said yes, and wrote it down, and found he had underlined it, which Hills did not do.

Nobody was hurt. Everybody kept saying it on the pavement, coats round their shoulders, faces blue in the turning lights. Tan stood in the middle of it, perfectly still, and told the sergeant the whole building was hers. Then, very quietly, to Vicky: "Find out who knew the floor plan."

Through the window Jono could see Ania. She had not moved. She was still in the corner by the fireplace, very straight. Chris was being steered towards the door by a constable with the guitar still round his neck, looking back along the bar.

Ania was looking at the window too. Not at the splintered panel or the police. At the small table, and the man at it, who had not moved either. He had sat through the crack and the screaming and the chairs going over with one hand flat beside his cup.

* * *

The sergeant wanted a word with him, of course. *You were the one he was going for, sir. Do you know why? Do you know him? Has anybody threatened you?* He answered every question pleasantly and quietly and told her nothing at all. He said he had only arrived in Torbay that afternoon, that he was nobody, really. He gave her a name and an address. Jono, reading them upside down, did not believe either for a second.

They put him in the back room to wait for a detective. The sergeant raised her eyebrows at Jono, one copper to another, and Jono went in to keep an eye.

Chairs over, a pint pooling on Richard's new floor, the main lights off and only the lamps on. Through the wall, the radios and the rain. The man sat at the long table by the fireplace with both hands round his cup now, the ordinary way, as if he were cold.

Jono righted a chair and sat down opposite.

"You all right?"

"Yes," said the man. "Thank you, Jono."

Jono had not told him his name. He went back through it, quickly, the way he had been going back through the glass and the wrist and the jacket. He had given it to the sergeant on the pavement, out of this man's hearing. He had not said it in the bar. Nobody had called it across the room. He was sure.

He opened his mouth to ask, and did not, because the man had looked up at him properly for the first time, across the table, in the lamplight.

* * *

He had seen that face before.

In a back garden in Paignton, thirty-six years ago to the day. Monday the sixth of April, 1992, about one o'clock, a cold north-east wind and a seagull on the roof next door. A man of thirty kneeling by a gate that had come off its hinge, who looked up when Jono came round the side of the house and put his screwdriver down on the gatepost. *Chris. Do you know a woman called Angela Shenton?*

Not like that face. That face. The same lines starting at the corners of the eyes, the same mouth held very still when it was

frightened, the same grey eyes, Wendy's eyes, that looked at you and then a fraction past you, checking the platform behind.

Jono sat very still. He had been a policeman for twenty-five years and a carer for ten, and he had sat across tables from a great many people who were not who they said they were. He knew what that felt like. This was not that. This was the other thing, the thing he had no training for: a man who was exactly who he looked like, and could not be.

Through the wall, under the rain, he could hear Chris on the pavement. Sixty-six, a little hoarse from the singing, patiently telling a constable for the second time how to spell Harvey.

The man across the table watched him understand it. He did not look away. He turned his cup a quarter turn on its saucer, by the handle.

And Jono placed that too. A kitchen table in Singapore, three in the morning, 2008, a brown file between them, and a man of forty-six turning a cold cup round and round while Jono told him the papers were no good.

"You'll want to write that down," said the man, quite gently.

Jono's hand was already in his inside pocket.

He opened the pocketbook on the table, the thirty-third, black oilcloth, pencil in the loop down the spine. He wrote the date and the time and the place, the way Jack had, the way Johnny had. *Thurs. 6 April 2028. Bailey's, back room, 10.40 p.m.*

Then he sat with the pencil above the page for a long time, and could not think of one true thing to put under it that anybody alive would believe.

Across the square, after a while, the hammer started again.

Chapter 2 – *The Butterfly*

Fri. 7 April 2028. Mrs Hellier, 7 a.m. call. Asked was anybody killed last night. Said no. She said: "Then somebody up the hill will be cross this morning." Asked who. She said: "Oh, there's always somebody up the hill, dear." Then asked for her teeth.

The butterfly came over the wall at ten past eight.

Mary Eden was on the terrace with her coffee, in the cardigan she wore before anybody could see her, looking down at the bay. From the top of her garden you could see all of it: Meadfoot below, the islands, Hope's Nose going out grey into the morning, and away across the water, very small, the low line of Berry Head with the lighthouse not yet out. Directly beneath the wall, two hundred feet down, lay the rough green shelf of Daddyhole Plain, where the gorse was coming into flower and a man with a spaniel was walking the path along the edge.

Her great-great-grandfather had died down there. Torn, the papers said. Dogs. She had read the cuttings when she was eleven, in a leather album in her grandmother's study, and had gone to bed that night and lain awake looking at the ceiling, not frightened, interested. *Dogs*, she had thought. *Nobody believes that.* She had been right.

The butterfly settled on the stone balustrade a foot from her hand.

A peacock. Early, for April, woken too soon by a warm week, and still slow with it. It opened its wings on the warm stone and there they were, the four eyes, blue and black and yellow, staring at her. It is a trick, she knew. The eyes are there to make a bird think

something larger is looking back. She had always liked that. A small soft thing pretending to be watched over.

She put her cup down. She put out her hand, slowly, the way you would to a cat, and closed her finger and thumb on its body between the wings, very gently, and lifted it off the stone.

It did not struggle much. They don't, when they're cold.

She looked at it for a moment, the eyes on its wings folded together now, staring at nothing. Then she pressed, just a little, finger to thumb, until she felt the small give of it, like a seed between your teeth.

She dropped it over the wall. It fell, turning, onto the slope above Daddyhole, and was gone in the gorse.

Mary Eden wiped her fingers on a linen napkin, picked up her coffee, and smiled.

* * *

She did not know why she smiled. She was honest with herself about that, if about nothing else. There was no pleasure in it, exactly. It was more like the feeling of putting a book back on the right shelf. A small thing put in order.

The headache came ten minutes later.

It always began the same way, with the light. A bright fault at the edge of her sight, low on the left, like the shimmer over a road in summer. Then it grew. It became a crescent, a broken ring of zigzag light, white and silver, slowly widening, so that whatever she looked at was eaten from the edge, the bay and the islands and the coffee cup, and replaced with that glittering, crawling line. She knew the word for it. Aura. Her consultant in Harley Street had drawn it for her on a notepad, a bent ring with teeth, and told her it was common, and harmless, and that the pain would follow in twenty minutes, and it always did.

She had never had them before this year. Not one, in fifty-two years. And then, in February, in the second week, when the thing on the news began, they started. Every few days. Then every other day.

She went inside before it got bad. Through the drawing room, with its long windows and the paintings her grandmother had bought and her mother had insured. Past the hall table. Up the stairs, one hand on the rail, because the left side of the staircase had gone to light. Into her bedroom, with the blinds down. She lay on the bed in her cardigan with her shoes on and a cold flannel over her eyes and waited for the glittering ring to finish crossing the dark.

And under it, as always now, at the bottom of the pain, the dream.

* * *

It was never long. It was never clear. It came in pieces, the way a radio comes in and out when you drive under a bridge.

A square. Stone underfoot, wet, a great many people standing on it, all facing one way. Bunting, or flags. Noise. And a man, in front of her, with his back to her, a broad back in a dark coat, and round his shoulders, lying on the dark cloth, a chain.

A heavy gold chain. Links as big as a child's hand, enamel and gilt, with a badge hanging from the front of it that she could not see because she could only ever see his back. A chain of office. A mayor's chain.

The man lifted his hand, to wave, or to point. The crowd made a sound.

And then a crack, flat and hard, not loud, smaller than she would have thought. The man's hand stopped in the air. His head went forward, as if he had seen something on the ground he wanted to pick up. And he folded, slowly, from the knees, forward, onto the wet stones, and the chain swung out from his chest as he went and

struck the ground before he did, with a sound like coins dropped on a counter.

The gold links on the wet stone. That was always the last thing. The gold links lying in a curve on the stone, catching the light, and somewhere close behind her, a woman's voice, very calm, saying something she could never hear.

Then the pain took the rest.

* * *

When she woke it was nearly ten, and the flannel was warm, and the ring had gone.

She lay still and let the world come back, edge first. The ceiling. The blind. The clock.

She had told nobody about the dream. Not the consultant, not her husband when she still had one, not Steve, God knows. She had told nobody because she did not know what it meant and she disliked very much the idea that anything in her own head might have a meaning she did not know.

She had seen a great many mayors. Torbay had had one of its own for fourteen years, and then not, and now there was to be a new one for the whole of Devon, in May, under the new deal. She had met most of them, and paid for some of them, and been introduced to all of them at dinners where they wore the chain. None of them had backs like that. None of them had ever fallen.

She thought, as she always did when she woke from it, *it's the medication*. And then, as she always did, *I'm not taking any*.

She got up and washed her face and changed her cardigan for a jacket, and put her hand to her throat, under the collar, where the whistle hung on its fine black cord against her skin.

It was cold. It was always cold, even after a night against her. A small curved thing, yellowish, the length of her finger, smooth

with handling, with three holes in it that did not seem to have been made by any drill. *Mongol*, her grandmother had said, giving it to her on her eighteenth birthday, in the study, with the album of cuttings open on the desk. *Bought in Peking by your great-great-grandfather. Taken off his body on the Plain by a man who should not have had it, and bought back, at a price. Wear it. Never blow it.*

Why not?

Because something will come, her grandmother said, and closed the album.

She had worn it for thirty-four years. She had never blown it. She had never, until this February, believed the second half.

She tucked it back under her collar and went down.

* * *

Steve was in the morning room with his iPad, sitting on the edge of a chair as if it might be taken away from him. He stood up when she came in.

"Mrs Eden. Sorry. I know you said ten, I was early, Margaret let me in. Are you all right? You look a bit—"

"I'm perfectly well." She sat at the table by the window. The bay was blue now, properly blue, the morning haze burned off. "You've seen the news."

"Yes. God. Yes." He sat down again, on the edge. Steve was forty-four and had worked for her for nine years and had still not learned how to sit in a chair in her house. He had been good-looking once, she supposed, in a rugby-club way; he had gone soft round the jaw and anxious round the eyes, and he wore suits that were a little too new. He was clever with numbers and stupid about everything else, which was why she kept him. "The police are saying a disturbance. One shot discharged, nobody hurt, a man detained and

released, another man sought. They're not saying who he was after. The *Herald*'s saying it was a robbery. It wasn't a robbery."

"No."

"It was the young man in the window." He swiped at his screen. "Nobody knows who he is. He gave the police a name, a London address, it's a flat over a dry cleaner's in Lewisham and nobody's ever heard of him there. He's not on anything. Not one thing, Mrs Eden. I've had people looking since six." He looked up. "And the man with the gun—"

"Was not ours," said Mary Eden.

It was not a question. Steve heard that it was not a question, and closed his mouth.

"Was he," she said.

"No. God, no. I mean, not that I—no." He put the iPad down flat on his knees. "I thought you'd want to know that. That it wasn't anything to do with us. Because people will think—with Bailey's, and Tan, and the Rage lot all in there, and it being opening night—people will think it was us. And I wanted you to know I'd checked. It wasn't."

She looked at him for a long moment.

He meant it kindly. That was the trouble with Steve. He had come up the hill at half past nine with his iPad and his new suit to tell her, anxiously, that her hands were clean, as if she might be worried. As if it had not occurred to him that there might be somebody in this house who did not need to ask Steve, or her, before sending a man with a gun into a public bar.

"Thank you, Steve," she said. "Was there anything else?"

* * *

There were figures. There were always figures. He brought them up on the iPad and turned it round on the table so that she could see.

Robinson's numbers, for May. Up four points since March. The polling company was one of theirs, and the numbers were probably even true. The campaign accounts, with the donations coming in through the three companies in Exeter and the one in Jersey, nothing over the limit, nothing a journalist would find in a hurry. Bookings at the Grand and the Imperial, down. Bookings at Bailey's, opened nine hours ago, already full for May.

"And the Tan money," said Steve. "The fifteen-year commitment. He's put another eleven million into the Torbay fund since January. The forge has got Lottery money now. And there's a planning application in for the Debenhams building that's—" He swiped. "It's not one of ours. It's a firm from White Rock. Ex-Lightwave. If that goes through—"

"It won't."

"It might, Mrs Eden. That's what I'm saying. The councillors on the committee, I've done the numbers, and since the projection last year, and the Leader going, three of them have—"

"Steve."

He stopped.

"I don't need you to do the numbers on the councillors," said Mary Eden. "I know the councillors. I had two of them to dinner on Tuesday. I know which way they will vote on the Debenhams building, and I know which way they will vote when Robinson is Mayor and the committee is his, and I know what each of them would like for Christmas." She looked at him. "I need you to do the numbers on the hotels. That's all. The hotels and the bookings and the rents. Can you manage that?"

His face went the colour it went. She had seen it go that colour a hundred times. It started at the collar.

"Yes, Mrs Eden."

"Good." She turned back to the window. "Then you can go."

He gathered up the iPad. At the door he hesitated, the way he always did, as if there were something else he had come to say and he had forgotten what it was, or lost his nerve.

"Mrs Eden. The thing on the news. The object. They're saying __"

"Goodbye, Steve."

The door closed. She heard him in the hall, saying something to Margaret, too cheerfully, and the front door, and his car on the gravel, going too fast down the drive and having to stop, abruptly, at the gate, for the gate to open.

She watched the bay. She felt nothing much. She had done that to him a hundred times. It was not even unkindness, really. It was only putting a thing back on the right shelf.

* * *

But the question he had not finished stayed in the room after he had gone.

The object. They were saying. Everybody was saying. It had been on the news every night since February, the way things are when nobody knows what they are: a small bright point on a black screen, a NASA spokesman, a professor from somewhere in a cardigan pointing at a graph. Something in orbit that had not been there. Something that had not been launched by anybody who would say they had. *Natural*, the professor said, *almost certainly*, and then could not say what kind of natural thing went round the Earth at that height, at that speed, and did not fall.

She had watched it, on the first night, from the sofa, and the light had begun at the edge of her eye before the item was over.

She did not believe in coincidence. Nobody in her family ever had.

* * *

Mary Eden sat at the window for a long time with her hands in her lap.

Then, without turning round, she said, "You can come in."

Nothing. The clock on the mantel. The sea, a long way down.

"I know you're there," said Mary. "You were there for all of it. You always are."

The door to the drawing room, which Steve had closed, was standing open about a foot. It had not opened. Mary had not heard it open. It was simply open now, the way doors in this house had been open, or shut, or not quite as she had left them, since a night in October two years ago when a woman she had been told to expect had come up the drive in a taxi from Paignton station with one bag.

Nobody came in.

But in the gap of the doorway, in the dim hall beyond, Mary could see a part of a grey sleeve, and a hand, resting on the newel post of the stairs. A woman's hand. Long, cool-looking, quite still. It was not an old woman's hand. The skin was smooth. There were no spots on it, no veins standing up. The hand of a woman of about forty.

Mary knew perfectly well that it was older than hers.

"It wasn't ours," she said to the hand. "Last night. Steve says. He checked." She paused. "Was it yours?"

The hand did not move.

"He's nobody," said Mary. "The young man. Steve says he's nobody. No name, no records, not one thing. Why would anybody send a man with a gun at nobody?"

For a long time there was no answer. Then, from the hall, a voice. Low, unhurried, an English that was too perfect, with nothing in it at all.

"Because he is not nobody," said the voice. "Nobody is ever nobody, Mary. That was your great-great-grandfather's mistake, on the Plain."

The hand lifted from the newel post.

"And I did not send the man to kill him," said the voice. "I sent him to see what would happen if somebody tried."

"And what happened?"

"A policeman stopped it. An old one. A Hills." A pause, almost amused. "There is always a Hills."

Mary sat very still.

"Your head," said the voice from the hall. "Does it hurt this morning?"

Mary did not answer. She had told nobody about the headaches. Not the consultant's receptionist, not Margaret. Nobody.

"Lie down when it starts," said the voice, quite kindly. "Do not fight it. And when you dream, Mary, try to see his face."

Footsteps on the stairs, light and even, going up. A door, somewhere above. Then nothing.

* * *

Mary Eden sat at the window until the sun had moved off the table.

Then she went out onto the terrace, into the bright April morning, and stood at the balustrade where the butterfly had been, and looked down at Daddyhole Plain.

The man with the spaniel had gone. The gorse was out all along the edge, yellow, smelling of coconut in the warmth. A path ran through it to the old coastguard hut and the cliff. Nothing moved.

She put her hand to her throat and felt the whistle under her collar. Cold.

Far below, on the slope, under a gorse bush she could not see, a peacock butterfly lay on its back with its four eyes open to the sky, watching nothing. A small soft thing pretending, until the last, that something larger was looking back.

Upstairs, behind her, at the window of the room at the end of the landing, a woman who looked about forty stood with a cup of tea poured from an old brown teapot that had come, a long time ago, from a factory shop in Burslem, and watched Mary Eden watching the Plain, and did not drink.

Chapter 3 – *The Situation Room*

Mon. 10 April 2028. Studio Ania, the cellar, 8.40 p.m. Took him down to C.H. Stood at the bottom of the stairs. Neither of them said anything for a long time. Then C.H. said, "Tea?" and they both reached for the kettle.

Clifford called it the Situation Room because he was American and could not help it.

It was a cellar. It had been a cellar since 1890, when the building above it was a draper's, and then a tape store for forty years when the building above it was a studio, and it still smelled faintly of both: damp wool and warm magnetic tape. Chris had cleared the last of the shelving out of it in the winter after the forge opened, and Clifford had come over from America with four flight cases and a man from Bristol who did not talk, and in a fortnight they had put in power and cooling and a line that Clifford said was better than the one at the naval base, and six screens on the long wall where the tapes had been, and a kettle.

The kettle was Chris's contribution. He was proud of it.

He sat in front of the screens on Monday evening with a mug in his good hand and watched a small bright point cross a black field, very slowly, from left to right.

"There," said Clifford. "Pass two-oh-seven. Right on time."

He was fifty-one now, Clifford, and the crew cut had gone grey and the baseball cap had gone, but he still sat in a chair the way he had in the press box in Bangkok, tipped back, one foot on the desk, as if the world were a game he was enjoying and had a modest sum riding on. He had a screen of numbers in front of him that scrolled faster than Chris could read.

"Ninety-six minutes," said Clifford. "Every orbit. Down to the second. Five hundred and forty kilometres up, give or take the width of this room. Inclination fifty-one point six." He pointed with his pen. "That's the space station's inclination, by the way. Same plane. It's sitting in the same lane as the ISS, a long way behind it, and it is not drifting. Nothing up there doesn't drift, Chris. There's air, even that high. Not much, but some. Everything slows down and falls. Satellites need a little push every few weeks or they come home." He tapped the screen. "Not this. Seven weeks. Not a metre."

"So something's pushing it."

"Nothing's pushing it. That's the point. No exhaust. No heat signature. No change in brightness. It's not doing anything. It's just staying." Clifford took his foot off the desk. "Like it's parked."

Chris watched the point cross the field.

He had watched it on the news in February, from the sofa, the same as everybody. *Natural, almost certainly*, the professor in the cardigan had said. And Chris had sat very still with his tea going cold and thought, quite clearly, in his mother's voice, the way she used to read out the weather: *There was a star over the bay that winter that did not move.*

His grandmother's nan had said it. Karen's nan had said it. Every old woman in Brixham had a version. A star in 1895 that hung over Berry Head all winter, and the coastguard watched it, and the dogs in the town went quiet.

He had not said that to Clifford. Clifford had come four thousand miles with four flight cases. You did not tell a man like that it was in your grandmother's stories.

* * *

"Now," said Clifford, and swung his chair round. "The bit I couldn't tell you on the phone."

He put a file on the desk. A real one, paper, in a grey folder, with a red stripe across the corner and a stamp Chris did not recognise.

"Starship," said Clifford. "July. Out of Texas. They're going to go up and get it."

Chris looked at him.

"Not *them* them. Not officially. Officially it's a cargo test." Clifford opened the folder. "Unofficially, there's a group. Ours and yours. Some people in Washington, some people in London. They call themselves the partners, which is the kind of name you give a thing when you don't want it to have a name. They've been watching this since the first night. They've tried everything. Radar, lasers, telescopes. It doesn't reflect right. It doesn't absorb right. Two of their instruments went blank when they pointed them at it. Not broken. Blank. Like it had looked back."

He turned a page. A diagram: a long silver rocket, an arm, a cradle.

"So they're going to catch it. Grab it, close the doors, and send it back down in one of these." Another page. A small cone, blunt, black underneath. "A StarFall capsule. Little reentry pod. Private outfit makes them for bringing drugs back from orbit, would you believe. Crystals. They grow better in zero G. Comes down under a parachute, splashes down, floats." Clifford sat back. "And it's coming down in the sea off North Wales."

"Why North Wales?"

"Because the orbit goes over it at the right time, and because there's a lot of empty sea there and not a lot of people looking. Liverpool Bay. Out past the wind farms. Night of the twenty-second of July, if they get it up and get it back."

"And why are you telling me?"

Clifford smiled. It was the old smile, the one from the press box, when the crowd had roared and he had said *no way*.

"Because they want Rage to fetch it," he said.

* * *

Chris put his mug down.

"They want *us*," he said. "A man with a stroke and a camera, a carer, an architect, and a boy who works a forge."

"They want somebody nobody's watching. Somebody who can be in a fast boat in Liverpool Bay at two in the morning and have a reason. They can't use their own. If the Navy goes out to pick up a capsule, every satellite the Russians and the Chinese own will be pointing at that patch of sea by midnight. If a Coast Guard cutter goes, same thing. They need somebody deniable." Clifford spread his hands. "Who's more deniable than a rock band?"

"We're not a rock band."

"You are on the twenty-second of July. I've already pencilled you in at the Cavern Club."

Chris laughed in spite of himself. Clifford grinned back. And then the grin went, and he leaned forward, and lowered his voice, although there was nobody in the cellar but the two of them.

"That's the official reason," he said. "Here's the one that's not in the file."

He brought a new window up on the centre screen. A line of text. Ones and zeros, scrolling.

"It's transmitting," said Clifford. "Not much. A burst, once an orbit, when it's over the Atlantic. Very low power. Our people found it in the second week. Took them a month to decode, and when they did, they got nothing. Letters. Gibberish. They gave it to a woman at your GCHQ, old lady, been there since the eighties, very good, and

she sat with it one afternoon and said it wasn't gibberish. She said it was a dialect. Devon." He looked at Chris. "She said, *Give it to the Torbay people. They'll know.*"

He typed. The ones and zeros stopped scrolling and became words.

ZIDER AT GRANS

Chris sat and looked at it for a long time.

"Chris?" said Clifford. "You know what that is?"

"Yes," said Chris.

He knew exactly what it was. He had read it in Jack Hills's own hand, in the first of the thirty-one pocketbooks, in pencil gone silver with age, at Jono's kitchen table in Preston in the winter after he came home. *12.20 a.m. Home. Code agreed. Zider at Gran's = meeting.* A code made up in a cider house in Winner Street in November 1895 by a constable and a tram conductor and a tall man from London who disliked being called Maister. To send telegrams that nobody else could read.

Zider at Gran's. Meeting. Come.

"It means somebody wants to meet," he said.

"Who?"

"I don't know." He did not take his eyes off the screen. "But it's an invitation to Rage. Nobody else has ever used that code. Nobody else has ever *known* it." He thought of a woman at GCHQ, old, been there since the eighties, very good. *Give it to the Torbay people.* He did not let himself think her name.

"There's one more thing," said Clifford.

* * *

He brought up another window. A list of IP addresses, and times, and a map with a red dot on it.

"Our people aren't the only ones listening," he said. "There's a ground station that's been pulling down the same telemetry. Same burst, same frequency, every orbit since February. It's commercial. Leased. They hide it well, but not that well." He pointed at the red dot. "It's in Jersey."

Chris looked at the dot.

Jersey. Where the company had been that owned the Albion and the Bailey's site, and that had wanted so badly, after the night of the projection, to be rid of everything it owned in the bay. Jersey, where the money for Robinson's campaign went round once before it came home.

"Eden," said Chris.

"Somebody," said Clifford, carefully. "I don't do names. I do dots." He closed the window. "But whoever it is knows what's up there, and knows it's talking, and has been listening as long as we have. Maybe longer." He looked at Chris. "And on Thursday night somebody sent a man with a gun into your new pub. I'm just saying."

Chris did not say anything.

"Who was the kid in the window?" said Clifford.

"I don't know," said Chris. That was true, on Monday at eight o'clock. It stopped being true forty minutes later.

* * *

He heard Jono's car first. Then the street door, and Jono's voice in the studio upstairs, low, saying something to somebody. Then two sets of feet on the cellar stairs, Jono's heavy and careful, the way he went down any stairs now, as if he had a frail person on his arm. And another set. Lighter. Quicker. Taking the stairs the way you take stairs at thirty.

Chris stood up. He did not know why. Something in the tread.

Jono came down into the light first and stopped at the bottom of the stairs and stood to one side. He had a look on his face that Chris had seen once before, on a garden path in Paignton in 1992, the colour of the sky behind him, white with the blue showing through.

And behind him, the young man from the window.

He stopped on the last stair. He looked at the screens, and the flight cases, and Clifford, briefly, with something like fondness. Then he looked at Chris.

Chris had been looked at by a great many people in his life. By Johnny Hills at a level crossing. By Ingrid Petrick in a hall in Hamburg. By Ania, every October, across a table in the bay window. He had never been looked at like this. It was not curiosity. It was not recognition, exactly. It was the look you give an old photograph of yourself, when you have forgotten it was taken and somebody hands it to you, and you see the face and think: *Oh. Him. I'd forgotten him.*

And Chris looked back, and saw the face, and could not, for a moment, breathe.

He had seen it in mirrors. A long time ago. In a shaving mirror in a flat in Highbury, with the guitar on the bed behind him. In the window of a night train between Paris and Amsterdam. In the glass of a greenhouse door in Paignton, on the sixth of April 1992, with his mother's reflection behind it and a bootlace in his hand.

He had not seen it for thirty-six years.

Nobody said anything. The screens hummed. On the centre screen, the small bright point crossed the black field from left to right.

Then Chris heard himself say, quite normally, "Tea?"

And the young man said, "Please," and they both turned, at the same moment, towards the kettle, and stopped.

* * *

Clifford looked from one to the other. He opened his mouth, and shut it, and sat down very slowly in his chair. He did not put his foot on the desk.

Chris made the tea. His hand was shaking, the bad one, worse than usual, so that the spoon chattered against the side of the mug. The young man stood at the end of the desk and did not offer to help, and Chris understood, without being told, that he knew it would not be welcome. That he knew exactly how Chris felt about people helping with his hand.

Of course he knew.

He gave him the mug. The young man took it and turned it a quarter turn on the desk, by the handle, before he picked it up.

Chris watched him do it.

"Jono says you know who I am," he said.

"Yes."

"Then you'd better tell me who you are."

The young man looked at the tea for a while. Then at Jono, at the bottom of the stairs. Then at Chris.

"You won't believe me," he said. "So I won't say it. Not yet. I'll tell you something instead, and you can decide."

He put the mug down.

"In September 1991," he said, "you walked home from Camden to Highbury. Four miles. You sat on the end of the bed with the guitar, and you wrote a song. It took all night. You've never played it to anybody. Not Debbie, because she'd gone. Not Basil.

Not Karen. Nobody." He paused. "It's in D. It's slower than the others. The first line is about a calendar from a guitar shop."

And he said the first line.

Quietly. Not sung. Just said, the way you say a thing you have known for so long it has worn smooth.

Chris sat down.

He sat down on the flight case behind him because there was nowhere else, and put his good hand flat on his knee, and looked at the floor.

Nobody had ever heard that line. He had never written it down. It was not in the notebooks or the archive or the shoeboxes or the Tiger carton. It was in one place in the world, and that place was behind his own eyes, and it had been there for thirty-six years, and nobody, nobody, had ever been in there.

"How," he said. It was not a question. He could not make it one.

"The same way you know it," said the young man.

* * *

It was Jono who spoke next. He had not moved from the bottom of the stairs.

"He's got your habits," Jono said. "All of them. He sat with his back to the wall in Bailey's. He clocked the exits before he sat down. He turns his cup. He looked along the crowd, not at it." He paused. "And on Thursday night, when a man pulled a gun ten feet away from him, he didn't move. Not a muscle. I've only ever seen one other man do that." He looked at Chris. "On the platform at Tanjong Pagar. In Basil's photographs."

Chris made himself look up.

The young man was standing by the desk with his hands at his sides, the way Ania stood. Not moving. Letting himself be looked at. And Chris looked, properly, the way Sue had taught him, the way you look at a face that does not want to be read.

It was his face. It was his face at thirty. And it was not. Something behind it was wrong, or not wrong, but other. The eyes were his eyes, Wendy's eyes, grey. But they were older than the face. Much older. They were older than Chris's own, and Chris was sixty-six. They had the look he had seen once in the eyes of Raymond Achard among the coffee sacks, and once in Douglas Hills's, in Pimlico, with the light behind him, at the very end. The look of somebody who has outlived nearly everyone, and knows how most of it turns out, and has stopped expecting to be surprised.

Chris looked for a long time. Then he could not any more, and looked away, at the screen, at the bright point crossing the dark.

When he looked back, the young man had looked away too. At the floor. As if it cost him the same.

* * *

"What do I call you?" said Chris.

The young man thought about it.

"Keith," he said. Something happened at the corner of his mouth that was very nearly a smile. "The middle one. Nobody's used it since Mum. Basil used to write it on the cards, when he was four. He found it in the passport and thought it was the funniest thing in the world."

Chris remembered. A card on the fridge in Tiong Bahru, in crayon, a stick man with a camera. *KEITH.* He had kept it for years. He did not know where it was now.

"I've forgotten a lot," said Keith, as if he had heard that. "Getting here. It costs. Every time you move anything, it costs, and

you don't get to choose what it takes." He looked at the screen. "I don't remember Sue's face. I remember the cup. The wiped cup in Kentish Town. But not her face." He was quiet for a moment. "I remember the song. I made sure of the song."

Chris could not answer that.

Keith nodded towards the screen, towards the bright point going over.

"That's how I'm here," he said. "While it's here, I can be. When it goes, I go." He looked at Clifford, who was sitting very still in his chair with his mouth slightly open. "Your people are right. It's not drifting. It's parked. It's waiting."

"For what?" said Clifford. His voice had gone small.

Keith looked at the words still showing in the corner of the screen.

ZIDER AT GRANS

"For somebody to come," he said.

"Did you send that?" said Chris.

Keith was quiet for a long time.

"I don't know," he said. "I might have. I think I would have." He turned his mug a quarter turn on the desk. "I told you. It costs."

* * *

They sat in the cellar until nearly midnight, the four of them, and did not talk about much. Clifford, recovering, went through the Starship file again for Keith, and Keith listened and asked two questions, both of them about the capsule's beacon, and both of them the kind Chris would have asked. Jono sat on the bottom stair with his pocketbook on his knee and wrote nothing. The kettle went on three times.

Chris could not look at Keith for long. He tried. He would look across the desk and see his own hand, younger, unbroken, reaching for a pen, and have to look at the screens instead. And every time, when he looked back, Keith was looking away too. At the screens. At the floor. At the dark corner where the tapes used to be.

Once, near the end, they looked at the same moment, and held it, for perhaps three seconds. One man, two ages, across a desk in a cellar, in the blue light of a thing parked in the sky.

Then Keith looked down at his tea, and said, very quietly, "You were right not to play it to anybody."

And Chris said, "I know."

At midnight, on the centre screen, the bright point came round again, exactly on time, and crossed from left to right, and went on.

Chapter 4 – *Howling*

Sat. 22 April 2028. The forge, 9.15 p.m. Fred carrying Biscuit home under his arm like a parcel. Says he won't walk after dark. Since the 6th. Asked what he's frightened of. Fred said: "Nothing. That's what's frightening. There's nothing there."

The first time, Fred thought he'd hurt his paw.

It was the Friday after Bailey's opened, ten o'clock, the forge banked down for the night and the big doors shut, and Fred came out of the side door into the square with the lead in his hand and said, "Come on, then," the way he had said it every night for six years. And Biscuit did not come.

He stood in the doorway. Front feet on the step, back feet on the workshop floor, not one inch further. Head down. Ears flat. And a sound coming out of him that Fred had never heard him make, not at the vet's, not on fireworks night, not in the storm when the sea came over the wall at Preston and Fred had carried him half a mile through the dark under his coat. A thin high whine, through the nose, like a kettle a long way off.

"What's up with you?"

Fred crouched and ran his hands down each leg, each paw, between the pads, the way the vet had shown him. Nothing. No thorn, no cut, no heat. Biscuit let him do it and did not stop whining and did not take his eyes off the square.

Fred looked where he was looking.

Station Square at ten on a Friday in April. Bailey's lit gold on the far corner, a few people in the public bar window. A taxi on the

rank with its engine off. The station dark, the last train gone. The lights at the level crossing. Nothing.

"There's nothing there, you soft lump."

He picked him up. Twenty-two kilos of Staffie, solid as a sack of sand, and Biscuit let himself be picked up, which he never did, and pressed his face into Fred's neck, and shook.

Fred carried him home like that. All the way up Hyde Road and along to the flat, the dog's heart going against his chest like a hammer on an anvil, too fast. And it was only when he was nearly at his own front door that Fred noticed the other thing, and stopped on the pavement, and listened.

There was a dog in the house at the end of his road that barked at everything. A Jack Russell, a mad one, called Pickle. Barked at the bin men, the postman, the wind, the moon. Fred had lived three doors down from it for two years and had never once walked past that house without Pickle going off like a car alarm behind the front-room curtains.

He walked past it now. Slowly. He stood outside the gate.

Nothing.

He looked up the street. Down it. All the houses, all the dogs he knew by their voices. The lurcher at number nine. The two spaniels on the corner. The German shepherd at the flats that somebody had complained to the council about.

Not one of them. The whole street was silent as a church.

He stood there until Biscuit stopped shaking. Then he took him in and shut the door and put the chain on, which he never did, and sat up with the telly on and the dog across his feet until two.

That had been the sixth of April. It was the twenty-second now. Biscuit had not walked out after dark once.

* * *

It was in the *Herald* by the Wednesday. Not the front page. Page nine, under a story about a planning row in Ipplepen.

BIG CATS? NO, SAY WALKERS: "IT WAS DOGS."

Two retired teachers from Bovey Tracey, walking back to their car at Hound Tor at dusk, had seen three animals on the skyline above the old medieval village. Grey. Bigger than any dog either of them had ever seen. They had stood quite still, side by side, on the rocks, looking down at the walkers. Then they had turned and gone over the top, not running, the woman said, *going*, like water.

We know what we saw, said the husband. *They were dogs. Very big grey dogs. And the funny thing was, our own dog, who barks at sheep, at ponies, at everything, never made a sound. He sat down on my feet and stayed there.*

A man from the National Park said there had been no reports of dogs out on the moor, and that walkers should keep to the paths. A woman from a big-cat society said it was a very interesting sighting and she would like to hear from anybody else.

She heard from forty people in a week.

* * *

Karen read it on her phone at the kitchen table, in her mum's old house on the steps, with the tin on the mantelpiece behind her and the evening coming down over the harbour.

There was a Facebook group now. *Dartmoor Sightings 2028.* Somebody's nephew had started it. It had four thousand members and photographs that were all of nothing, or of rocks, or of a blur that might have been a sheep. And underneath, hundreds of comments. *Heard howling at Haytor last night about 11. Never heard anything like it. My cocker won't go in the garden. Same*

here, Widecombe, the farm dogs have gone dead quiet, my dad's never known it. Anyone else notice the dogs?

Karen scrolled through it with her glasses on the end of her nose and her tea going cold.

Anyone else notice the dogs?

She had. She had not put it into words. But she had noticed. Brixham was a town of dogs, it always had been, every fishing family with a dog on the step and a dog on the boat, and Brixham dogs barked. At gulls, at tourists, at each other across the harbour. You lived with it like you lived with the gulls. And for two weeks now, after dark, Brixham had been quiet.

She had thought it was the weather. She had thought it was her.

She put the phone face down on the table, and looked at the tin on the mantelpiece, and went and got her coat.

* * *

She was sixty-seven. She drove a little blue Fiesta that her younger daughter called the bathtub, and she had driven it up Berry Head most nights since Robbie died, when it was fine, and some nights when it wasn't. Out through Higher Brixham with the lights coming on in the houses, up past the holiday park and the old quarry, out onto the head, past the sign and the gate, and along to the far end of the car park, where it ran out by the low wall, and the grass went on a little way beyond it, and then there was nothing in front of you but the sea.

The place.

She parked in it. Nose to the sea. She turned the engine off and the lights off and sat.

The silence came down. It always did, up there, enormous. The wind in the grass. The sea at the foot of the cliffs, breathing. And in front of her, out at the end of the head, the little lighthouse, turning.

The long white arm of light came round over the water, and over the car, and over her, and went on.

She counted it. She always did. She had never told anybody that.

She had told Chris, once. In 1979, in his Mini, in this exact place, with her feet on his dashboard, she had told him she counted the lighthouse because her dad had, from the boat, to know where he was. And Chris had said *I'll count it with you*, and they had sat there in the dark counting a lighthouse together like a pair of idiots, until she laughed so much she had to get out of the car.

That was forty-nine years ago. She had counted it on her own ever since.

* * *

She did not know what she and Chris were. She had stopped trying to say.

He had come home in 2018 and she had been on the platform at Torquay, which she did not do, and he had said *for good*, and she had straightened his collar. And after that she had thought she knew. She had thought it would be the quay, and then the head, and then the rest of it, the way it should have been in 1980 if she had not been nineteen and frightened and written that letter.

And it hadn't been. Or it had been, a bit. They had walked on the breakwater. He came to the quay and they looked at the boats. He had sat in her kitchen and drunk her tea and looked at the tin on the mantelpiece and laughed when she told him she'd never spent the gold either. Twice he had kissed her, at her door, and she had let him, and both times he had gone home afterwards, and she had let him do that too.

And then there had been his stroke. And then there had been all of it in Paignton, the fire and the film and the forge and the crowds and Jono on a bollard with a loudspeaker, and Chris in the middle of

it, on the news, on the internet, a sick man with a camera who had made the whole country look at Torbay. She had watched it on her phone in this car. She had been proud of him. She had not gone. She did not know why. It had felt like his, not hers.

And now somebody had fired a gun in the new hotel on the opening night, ten feet from where he was playing guitar. She had read that in the *Herald* too. *Nobody hurt.* She had sat in this car with the phone in her lap and read it four times, and not rung him, because she did not know if she was somebody who rang.

They were not together. They were not apart. They were two people of sixty-six and sixty-seven who had been in love at seventeen and had never found out what to do about it, and it was too late to be young and too soon to be sensible, and in the meantime she drove up here at night and counted a lighthouse on her own.

That was all. That was what they were.

* * *

It started at twenty to ten.

She thought at first it was the wind. There was a place on the north side of the head where the wind came through a gap in the old fort wall and made a note, low, like somebody blowing across the top of a bottle. She had heard it a thousand times. She knew it.

This was not that.

It started low, and rose. One long note, rising and rising, until it was higher than any wind she had ever heard and went on long after any breath would have stopped. Then it fell. And as it fell, another one came in under it, from somewhere else, further along the head, towards the old quarry. And then a third.

She sat very still with her hands on the wheel.

It was not a dog. She had grown up with dogs. She had had them on the boat and on the step and in her bed when she was little and frightened of the storms. A dog howls the way a child cries: it wants you to come. This did not want anybody to come. It was not calling. It was not lonely. It was the sound of something that had always been there, out on the head in the dark, a long time before the car park and the lighthouse and the town, and was simply letting itself be heard again.

The three voices came together, and held, and made a chord. And under it, very faint, at the bottom of everything, the sea.

Then they stopped. All at once. As if somebody had closed a door.

Karen did not move.

The lighthouse came round. The white arm went out over the water, and over the car, and over the grass in front of her, and for one second, at the very edge of the light, on the slope going down towards the north fort, she thought she saw something. Grey. Low. Long. Three of them. Standing quite still, on the grass, in a line, with their heads turned towards her.

And the beam went on, and it was dark, and when it came round again there was nothing on the slope but grass.

* * *

She sat in the car for a long time.

She was not frightened. That surprised her afterwards. She had been frightened of a great many things in her life, of the sea, of being left, of letters, of platforms. She had been frightened in this car many times. She was not frightened now. She felt the way you feel when you open a door in a house you grew up in and find a room you had forgotten was there, and it is exactly as you left it, and has been waiting.

There was a star over Berry Head one winter that wasn't a proper star.

She had told Chris that. In 1979, after midnight, in the Mini, with the window wiped clear with the sleeve of her brother's jumper. Her nan's story. Old Jory's wife's story. *It didn't move round with the others. It just sat there. Low, over the sea, over the head. For months. And all the dogs in Brixham howled while it was there, and there were things on the moor.*

Nan says she was a bit simple.

Karen wound the window down. The cold came in, and the smell of the sea and the gorse, and she leaned her head out and looked up.

The sky was clear. Not as clear as 1979; there were more lights now, Brixham and Torquay and the ships and the glow over Paignton where the new hotel was. But clear. The stars were out over the Channel. And she looked for a long time, along the south-east, low over the sea, the way the old woman must have looked a hundred and thirty years ago from her doorstep in Higher Brixham.

She did not see anything that did not belong. She did not know what she was looking for. It was on the news, the thing up there, she knew that, but it was too small to see, they said, it went round too fast, it was nothing you would notice.

She sat back in her seat.

All the dogs in Brixham howled.

And she understood, sitting there with the window down and the cold on her face, that the old woman had got it wrong. Or Nan had, telling it. Or Karen had, at seventeen, remembering it wrong in a car with a boy she loved and wanted to frighten a little so that he would put his arm round her.

It was not the dogs that howled. The dogs had been quiet. Every dog in Brixham, silent as a church, sitting down on their owners' feet, the way they were silent now, every night, for a fortnight.

It was the other things that howled. Out on the head. In the dark. While the star was up.

* * *

She rang him at ten past ten.

She did not decide to. She had the phone in her hand and she was looking at his name, and then it was ringing, and then it was too late to stop.

He answered on the fourth ring.

"Karen?"

"Hello."

A pause. She could hear something behind him: a hum, electrical, and a man's voice, American, saying something about a beacon. Then a door, and the hum went, and it was quiet.

"Are you all right?" said Chris. "It's late."

"I know. I'm fine." She looked out through the windscreen at the dark. "Are you?"

"Yes." Another pause. "Where are you?"

"Up the head."

He did not say anything to that. She heard him not say it.

"I read about the hotel," she said. "The gun. I meant to ring before."

"Nobody was hurt."

"That's what it said." She turned the key in the ignition, a quarter turn, so that the dashboard lit up and the clock came on, and then turned it back. "I just wanted to know you were all right."

"I'm all right."

"Good."

The lighthouse came round. She watched it go over the slope towards the north fort. Grass. Nothing.

"Karen," said Chris. "Has something happened?"

She opened her mouth to tell him. About the sound. About the three grey shapes at the edge of the light. About Nan and old Jory's wife, and the star, and the dogs. About sitting here and not being frightened, and why. He would understand. He was the only person alive she could tell who would not say *it was the wind*.

She did not tell him.

She did not know why, either. Afterwards, driving home, she thought it was because it felt like hers. The way all the business in Paignton had felt like his. She had sat in this place on her own for fourteen years, and whatever was out on the head tonight had let itself be heard by her, on her own, and she was not ready to give it to anybody yet. Not even him.

"No," she said. "Nothing's happened. I just wanted to hear you."

There was a long silence on the line. Not an awkward one. The other kind.

"I'm glad you rang," said Chris.

"So am I."

"Will you be on the quay on Sunday?"

"I'm always on the quay on Sunday."

"I know," he said. "I'll come and look at the boats."

"All right."

Neither of them said goodbye. They never did. After a while she heard him breathe out, the way he did when he was smiling and did not want her to hear, and then the line went quiet, and she put the phone down on the passenger seat.

* * *

She did not drive home straight away.

She sat in the place with the window down and the engine off, counting the lighthouse. Round, and light, and dark. Round, and light, and dark. She counted it a hundred times, the way her dad had from the boat, to know where she was.

Nothing else made a sound. Not the head. Not the town below her. Not one dog, in the whole of Brixham.

At eleven she wound the window up and started the car and drove home, slowly, down through Higher Brixham with the houses dark, and let herself in, and went up to bed.

On the mantelpiece downstairs, in the tin, in the dark, two German sovereigns that nobody had ever spent lay where they had lain since 1915, and the house was perfectly quiet.

Out on the head, the lighthouse went round all night, and counted itself.

Chapter 5 – *The Waybill*

Sun. 23 April 2028. Widecombe Cot, back room, 11.50 p.m. K. read the waybill and Jack's first book side by side. Said, quietly: "That's how I get there." C.H. did not ask what he meant. Neither did I.

Chris rang at six and said, "Bring the first one. Jack's. The very first."

Jono said, "Why?"

"Because I've got something to show you," said Chris, "and I should have shown you two years ago, and I didn't, and I'm sorry."

So at nine o'clock on a Sunday night Jono drove up the hill to Widecombe Cot with a tin box on the passenger seat.

It was the same tin. It had always been the same tin: a square black biscuit tin with the paint worn through to the metal at the corners, and a picture on the lid of a coaching inn in the snow that nobody had been able to see properly since about 1950. It had lived on top of Johnny's wardrobe, and then under Douglas's bed in Pimlico, and then in Jono's mum's loft in Preston, and for the last ten years in the bottom of Jono's own wardrobe, under his police boots, which he still had and could not throw away. Thirty-one pocketbooks, black oilcloth, the elastic long perished, each one wrapped in a sandwich bag against the damp.

He had only brought the first. It sat on the seat beside him in its bag on top of the tin, the size of his hand, and he kept glancing at it at the lights, the way you glance at a sleeping child in a car seat.

Bring the first one.

* * *

Widecombe Cot was dark except for the back room and one light on the landing, which was Wendy's. Ninety-two. She went up at eight now with a hot-water bottle and the radio, and slept, Chris said, like a girl.

Chris let him in at the back door, by the scullery, and put a finger to his lips and nodded up at the ceiling, and Jono nodded, and they went down the passage in their socks like burglars.

Keith was in the back room. At the long deal table, at the end by the range, in the chair where Harold used to sit. He stood up when Jono came in, and nodded, and sat down again.

Jono had seen him four times now since Bailey's. Every time, it was the same. A sort of drop in the stomach, like missing a stair in the dark. You would think you would get used to it. You did not. He had sat across a hundred tables in his life from people who were lying to him about who they were, and he had always been able to feel it, the way you feel a draught. With Keith there was no draught. Keith was exactly who he looked like. That was what you could not get used to.

The kettle was on the range. Three cups out, with the green band round the rim. And in the middle of the long table, on its own, on a clean white tea towel, as if it were something from a hospital, there was a book.

A Bible. An old one, black, the leather gone grey at the corners and the spine cracked and mended with brown tape. Jono knew it. He had seen it in this room before, on the shelf by the dresser, for years now, among the cookery books and the bound volumes of the *Herald*, and never once thought about it.

Chris sat down in front of it. He put his good hand flat on the cover.

"This was Edward's," he said. "His mother gave it him when he left home. He kept it in his lodgings in Church Street, and then in

the house at Preston, and then it went to Leonard, and Leonard gave it to Dad when he married Mum, and it sat in the front room at Paignton for fifty-seven years." He looked at Jono. "When Dad died, Mum gave it to me. She said Dad wanted me to have it. She said he'd said, *Tell him to look between the Testaments.*"

He opened it.

Not at the front. In the middle. The pages fell open by themselves, the way a book falls open at the place where something has been kept for a long time, and there, between the end of Malachi and the beginning of Matthew, lying flat on the thin paper, was a piece of card.

* * *

It was smaller than Jono had expected. About the size of a postcard, but longer and thinner, gone the colour of weak tea, soft as cloth at the creases. On the side facing up there was printing, faded black: a column of names down the left, ruled lines across, little boxes. *TORQUAY TRAMWAYS COMPANY. CONDUCTOR'S WAYBILL.* And the stages. *Paignton Station. Preston. Livermead. Torre Abbey. Belgrave Road. The Strand.* And in each box, in tiny cramped pencil, numbers. Fares. Ticks.

And at the top, in a rubber stamp, purple once and now nearly grey:

31 OCT 1895.

"Turn it over," said Chris.

Jono did not touch it. He looked at Chris. Chris nodded. So Jono put out one finger, the way you would touch a moth, and turned it over.

The back was blank card, ruled very faintly. And across it, in pencil gone silver with age, in a young man's hand that was trying hard to be neat and not quite managing, two lines:

I would give you my mobile number, but that would do no good.

And below that, smaller, squeezed into the space at the bottom, in the same hand but older, shakier, in a different pencil:

26 Sept. 96. Last car. Mr P. got down at Corbyn Head. Raised his hat. Heard one of them out past Berry Head, going south. Not finished.

* * *

Jono read it three times.

Then he sat back in his chair and looked at the ceiling, at the old beam with the hook in it where Nancy used to hang the ham, and breathed out.

"You've had this since your dad died," he said.

"Since 2016."

"And you never said."

"No."

"Through all of it. The fire. The film. The projection. Me on a bollard with a loudspeaker. You never said."

"No," said Chris.

Jono looked at him. Chris was not looking back. He was looking at the waybill on the white tea towel, with his bad hand in his lap and his good one resting on the edge of the Bible, and his face had the look it had had in the garden at Paignton in 1992, when Jono came round the side of the house. A man waiting to be told something he already knew.

"Why?" said Jono.

Chris was quiet for a long time.

"Because I didn't understand it," he said. "And everything else I've ever had in this family, I've understood in the end. Mum's book. Your thirty-one. Douglas. Even Ania, a bit. I could make them make sense. I could put them in order." He touched the edge of the card. "This I couldn't. A tram conductor in 1895, writing down a thing a man said to him in a pub. *Mobile number.* In 1895." He shook his head. "I thought Dad was having me on. I thought somebody in the family had done it for a joke, in the sixties, Leonard or somebody, with an old waybill. I took it to a man in Exeter who does old papers. He said the card was right, the ink on the stamp was right, the pencil was right, and the writing was the same hand as the bottom line, and the bottom line was done thirty years before anybody in the world had a telephone in their house, let alone in their pocket." He looked up. "So I put it back between the Testaments, and I didn't tell anybody. Because I didn't know what it meant. And I've been frightened of it for twelve years."

"And now?"

Chris looked across the table, past Jono, at Keith.

"Now I think I know who it was meant for," he said.

* * *

Keith had not said anything. He was sitting at the end of the table with his hands round his cup. Not looking at the waybill. Looking at Chris.

"Show him the book, Jono," said Chris.

Jono took the first pocketbook out of its sandwich bag.

He did it carefully. He always did. Black oilcloth gone dull and soft, the corners round as pebbles, the elastic gone, a pencil still in the loop down the spine, a stub, sharpened with a knife a hundred and thirty years ago and never sharpened since. He opened it on the tea towel beside the waybill.

He did not need to look for the place. He knew this book better than any book in the world. He had read it first at eighteen, at his dad's kitchen table in Preston, on the day he was given the tin, all night, by a reading lamp. He had read it at nineteen, in uniform, the week after Berry Head, looking for anything that would tell him what to do. He had read it a hundred times since.

But he had never, until this minute, read it beside the waybill.

The inside of the front cover first. Jack had written on it, later, not on the day. Jono had always known that; it was in a different pencil, blacker, and the hand was firmer than the first pages, the hand of a man who had been writing things down for a while. A note to himself, in the corner, small.

E.H. first met S.H. Thurs. 31 Oct. 95, Bailey's, public bar, about 5 p.m. Off the down train. Before this book.

Jono put his finger beside it, and then beside the purple stamp on the waybill.

31 OCT 1895.

"Same day," he said.

"Same day," said Chris.

Then the first page. *Thursday, 7th November 1895. 6.40 p.m. Off duty. Plain clothes. To Bailey's Hotel, Paignton, at the request of E. Harvey, tram conductor. Purpose not stated.* And under it, later that night: *11.10 p.m. Home. Met S. Holmes at Bailey's, with E. Harvey. Offered 2 sovs by "Purvis" (S.H. in disguise). Refused. Told S.H. of the four reports and Insp. R. Agreed to assist. Outside duty.*

And the last line of the entry, which Jono had read a hundred times and never once understood, and had always assumed was a constable being sharp about a gentleman's affectations.

S.H. looked at his wrist for the time. No watch there.

* * *

Nobody said anything for a while.

The range ticked. Upstairs, very faint, Wendy's radio, a late play, voices too low to make out.

Keith stood up.

He came round the end of the table, slowly, and stood between Chris and Jono, and looked down at the two things on the white tea towel. The waybill, silver side up. The pocketbook, open at the first page. Side by side, the way they had never been, in a hundred and thirty-three years. Edward's hand and Jack's hand. A tram conductor and a constable. The streets and the trams.

He did not touch them. He read. Jono watched him read. He watched his eyes go along the waybill line, *mobile number*, and stop, and go back, and go along again. Then across to the pocketbook. The inside cover. The date. The wrist.

And Jono saw him do it.

Keith, reading, lifted his left hand a little from his side, and turned it, palm down, and glanced at the inside of his wrist. Quick. Without meaning to. The way you check a watch that is not there, because you have checked one there every day of your life and your hand has not been told it's gone.

There was nothing on his wrist. A young man's wrist, bare, with the tendons standing out.

Jono looked at Chris. Chris had seen it too. He had gone very still.

Keith put his hand back down at his side. He did not seem to know he had done it.

He looked at the two pieces of paper for a long time. Then he said, so quietly that Jono nearly did not hear it over the range and the radio:

"That's how I get there."

* * *

Jono's hand was already moving to his inside pocket. He felt it go and let it.

Chris did not say anything.

Jono waited for him to. He knew Chris. He had known him all his life, since a pew in Preston and a knitted hat. Chris was a man who asked. He had asked Douglas in Pimlico and Achard in the Marais and Ania in Room 3, he had asked everybody, all his life, because he could not bear not to know how a thing worked. *What do you mean*, Chris would say. *Get there how? Get where?*

Chris did not say it.

He sat at the long table with his good hand on the edge of Edward's Bible and looked at Keith, and Keith looked back, and something went between them that Jono could see and could not read. Then Chris looked down at the waybill. And he nodded, very slightly, once, the way you nod to a man across a room when there is nothing that needs to be said.

He did not ask.

Jono understood, watching him, that he was not going to. That he had decided, right there, at the table, not to. Not because he did not want to know. Because he did, more than he had ever wanted to know anything, and he had understood that this was the one thing in his life where knowing would change it. Where if somebody told him, he would do it differently.

If I tell you, you will do it differently. Ania had said that to him once. In 1992, at the table in the bay window, about Singapore.

Chris had told Jono that, years ago, on Berry Head, in a rusty Fiesta. Jono had written it down.

* * *

Keith went back to his chair and sat down.

"I'm sorry," he said, to Chris. "I know what that was like. Twelve years." He looked at the waybill. "I'd forgotten that you'd had it that long. I'd forgotten the man in Exeter." He was quiet. "I'd forgotten a lot. But not that card. I made sure of that card."

Chris said, "Did he know? Edward. What it meant."

"No," said Keith. "He knew it frightened him. He knew to keep it. That was enough." He looked at the bottom line, the shaky one. *Not finished.* "He was right about that too."

Upstairs the play had finished. The radio was playing something quiet now, piano, very low.

Then a creak, on the landing. A door. The slow careful sound of somebody of ninety-two coming to the top of the stairs with a hand on the rail.

"Chris?" said Wendy, from the top of the stairs. "Is that you down there?"

And Chris said, "Yes, Mum," and Keith said, "Yes, Mum," at exactly the same moment, in exactly the same voice.

Nobody in the back room moved.

There was a long pause at the top of the stairs.

"Well, don't stay up all night," said Wendy at last. "And put the guard in front of the range. Your grandfather always forgot." And the door on the landing closed, and the radio went on, and after a while it went off, and the house was quiet.

Keith had put both hands flat on the table. He was looking at them. Jono saw that they were shaking, and that he was letting them.

Chris got up, and went and put the guard in front of the range.

* * *

At a quarter to twelve, when Keith had gone out into the night, the way he went, without saying where, Jono sat at the long table alone with the pocketbook open in front of him. Not Jack's. His own. The thirty-third.

Chris was in the scullery, washing the three cups.

The waybill was back between the Testaments. Chris had put it there himself, very carefully, with the tea towel under his hands, and closed Edward's Bible, and put it back on the shelf by the dresser among the cookery books and the bound *Heralds*, where it had sat since 2016 and where nobody would look at it twice.

Jono wrote the date and the time and the place. He wrote down what Keith had said. He wrote that C.H. had not asked what he meant.

Then he sat with the pencil above the page and thought about adding *neither did I,* and whether it was true.

It was. He had not asked either. He had sat in his chair with his hand going to his inside pocket and his mouth shut, for the same reason as Chris. Because he was a Hills, and the Hills had been sitting at tables in back rooms not asking things for a hundred and thirty-three years, and writing it down instead, so that one day somebody would know what it meant.

He wrote it. *Neither did I.*

Then he closed the book, and put the elastic round it, and went into the scullery and picked up a tea towel, and dried.

Chapter 6 – *Decoy*

Sun. 23 July 2028. Liverpool Bay, 14 miles NNW of Rhyl, 2.07 a.m. Sea slight. No moon. Capsule down. Recovered 2.31. K. put his hand on it at 2.33 and has not taken it off. It is now 3.30. I have stopped asking.

Steve threw his iPad into the sea at twenty past nine on Saturday night, from the end of the breakwater at Brixham, and felt better than he had felt in nine years.

He had not planned to. He had driven over to Brixham after the call because he could not sit in his flat in Torquay with the call still in the room, and he had parked by the fish market and walked out along the breakwater in the last of the light with the iPad still in his hand, because he had forgotten he was holding it. Half a mile of grey stone out into the bay, with the sea on both sides and the lighthouse on the end. People fishing. A couple with a pushchair. Gulls.

The call had been at eight.

Mary Eden had rung him on video, which she did when she wanted to watch his face. She was in the drawing room, with the long windows behind her and the bay going gold. He was at his kitchen table with a microwave lasagne going cold.

"It's gone," she said. No hello. "The signal. The Jersey people say it stopped on Thursday morning, at six minutes past eleven our time, in the middle of a pass, and it has not come back."

"I know. I sent you the report. Thursday. That's when the launch was, the Starship thing in Texas, the cargo test. I put it in the report, I said it's too much of a coincidence, I think they went up and—"

"I read your report, Steve."

"Right. Sorry. So I thought, if they've gone up and taken it, they've got to bring it down. And it's got to come down somewhere. And I looked at the orbit, and the timings, and where the empty sea is, and there's a window on Saturday night, tonight, over the Irish Sea. Liverpool Bay. And then I looked at what Rage are doing this weekend." He had been proud of this. He had been up until three on Wednesday doing it. "They're in Liverpool. Tonight. The whole band. The Cavern Club. It was announced on Monday. It's a decoy, Mrs Eden. It's got to be. They've never played outside Torbay in their lives and suddenly they're—"

"Steve."

He stopped.

She looked at him through the screen for a long time. Her face did the thing it did, where it went perfectly pleasant and perfectly still, like a pond.

"Rage are playing a concert in Liverpool," she said, "because the man who runs the Cavern Club saw a film of them on the internet and asked them, and they said yes, because they are a band, and bands play concerts. I know this because I had somebody ring the Cavern Club on Monday." She paused. "And you think that a sixty-six-year-old man with a stroke and a guitar is going to slip out of a nightclub between songs and fetch something out of the Irish Sea that NASA could not find with a telescope."

"Not him. Somebody else. While everybody's watching him. That's the point of a—"

"Who?"

He opened his mouth. He did not have a who. He had the young man in the window at Bailey's, who was nobody, who had no name and no records, and he had nothing else.

"I don't know yet," he said.

"No," said Mary. "You don't." She leaned forward, a little. "Steve. I pay you to count rooms. Hotel rooms. Beds and rents and bookings. You are good at it. You are not good at this. I do not need you to be clever. I have people who are clever." Her eyes went, for a fraction of a second, past the screen, up, towards something in the room above her that he could not see. "I need you to count. Can you do that for me?"

He felt it start at his collar. The heat. He watched it come up his own neck in the little picture of himself in the corner of the screen.

"Yes, Mrs Eden."

"Good. Enjoy your evening."

And she was gone, and the screen showed him his own face, red to the ears, with the lasagne behind it.

* * *

He stood at the end of the breakwater with the iPad in his hand and looked at the sea.

It was a good iPad. The company had paid for it. It had on it, in a folder called *Hotels Q2*, everything he had found out about the orbit and the window and the Cavern Club, and in another folder, called *Misc*, a spreadsheet he had been building since 2019 with every payment Eden had made in Torbay that went through a company he had set up. Every one. Dates and sums and names. He had never been sure why he kept it. Insurance, he told himself. In case.

He thought about the face on the screen going still like a pond.

I do not need you to be clever.

He thought about nine years of standing up when she came into a room.

He drew his arm back and threw it. Hard. Further than he would have thought he could, like a boy skimming a stone. It turned over twice in the evening light, flashing, and went into the sea forty feet out with a small flat sound, and was gone.

A man fishing off the end turned round and stared at him.

"Slipped," said Steve.

And he laughed, out loud, on his own, at the end of the Brixham breakwater, for the first time in he did not know how long. Then he stopped laughing, because he had remembered that the spreadsheet was also backed up, every night, automatically, to a drive in a drawer in his flat.

He walked back along the breakwater in the dark, slowly, thinking about that.

* * *

The Cavern Club smelled the way Chris remembered cellars smelling in 1978. Beer and sweat and old brick and something electrical, hot.

It was not the real one. He knew that. The real one had been filled in in 1973 to make room for a railway ventilation shaft that was never built, and this one had been dug out again next to it in the eighties, with the old bricks, the same arches, the same narrow stage at the end. But it was close enough. Low curved brick vaults going back into the dark, painted black, the stage lit hot and white under the far arch, and three hundred people packed in under the ceiling with their phones up, close enough to touch, and the heat coming off them like a kitchen.

He sat on his stool with the guitar across his knee and looked out at them.

Three hundred witnesses. Clifford had said that, on the phone, in the cellar. *I need three hundred people who'll swear you were in Liverpool at two in the morning. And I need them to have filmed it.* They were filming it. Every one of them. Chris could see himself on twenty little screens at once in the front row, an old man with grey hair on a stool under a brick arch, very clear, very visible, very much in Liverpool.

Which was the point.

Somewhere ninety miles west, in the dark, a younger man with the same face was in a boat.

* * *

Ania sang.

She stood at the front of the little stage in her grey costume, very straight, hands at her sides, and set the words down one after another, and the Cavern Club went quiet the way every room went quiet. Three hundred people from Liverpool who had come to see a band off the internet, and Chris watched them lean forward, all together, as if somebody had opened a window.

He played under her. His bad hand ached. It always ached in heat. He played anyway, the way he had taught it to, steady, not showing off.

He played the one about the Mini and the lighthouse. He had not played it in public before. Ania had asked for it, in the van on the M5, looking out of the window, and he had said yes before he could think about why she wanted it, and now he was playing it in the Cavern Club at half past one in the morning in front of three hundred people with their phones up, and his throat had gone tight in the second verse and he had let it.

Karen, he thought, playing. *You'd laugh at this. Me, in the Cavern Club. Like a Beatle.*

He had not told her where he was going. He had said *a gig*, on the quay, on Sunday, and she had said *good*, and looked at the boats.

He looked at his watch, between songs, the way you do. Twenty to two.

His phone was in his back pocket, on silent. It had not moved since midnight.

* * *

The boat was black and long and very fast and belonged to somebody whose name nobody had told Jono.

It had been waiting for them at a jetty at Conwy at eleven, with a man in a black jacket standing beside it who handed Keith the keys and a waterproof case and said, "Fuel's full, Starlink's on the console, beacon frequency's on the card, God bless," and walked off up the jetty into the dark without looking back.

Keith had stepped down into it as if he had done it a thousand times. He had checked the fuel and the engines and the lights and the radio, quickly, without fuss, and started the engines, two big outboards that coughed and then settled into a deep rough mutter that Jono felt in his chest.

"You can drive this," Jono had said.

"Yes."

"Since when?"

Keith had looked at him across the console in the dark. "Later," he said. "A long time later." And he had pushed the throttles forward, and the boat had lifted its nose and gone out down the river and past the castle and into the bay as if it had somewhere to be.

That was three hours ago.

Now they were fourteen miles out in Liverpool Bay, past the last of the wind farms, the huge white turbines going round slowly

behind them in a long line with their red lights blinking on top, and in front of them there was nothing. Black sea. Black sky. No moon. A few stars. The coast of Wales a low dark line to the south with a handful of lights on it. And the boat sitting on the swell with its engines ticking over, rocking, very slightly, from side to side.

Jono had not been sick. He was proud of that. He sat in the seat beside the console in a borrowed lifejacket with a laptop on his knees in a waterproof bag, watching a map with a red dot on it and a green dot on it, and the red dot was them, and the green dot was coming.

"Four minutes," he said.

Keith said nothing. He was standing at the console, looking up.

* * *

The link went at five past two.

One second the green dot was there on the map, moving, a beacon signal from a falling thing, eighteen thousand feet and coming down under its parachutes towards a patch of sea a mile north-west of them. The next second the screen froze. Then a little wheel, turning. Then a box. *Connection lost.*

"No," said Jono. "No, no, no—"

He jabbed at it. Nothing. He looked at his phone. No signal. Fourteen miles out, there wouldn't be. The radio on the console was hissing. Clifford was meant to be on the other end of this laptop, in the cellar in Torquay, with the partners' feed. Clifford was gone.

"We've lost it," said Jono. "Keith, we've lost the—"

Keith reached across without looking and flipped a switch on the console beside a flat white dish the size of a pizza box that was bolted to the roof of the little cabin.

A light on it went from red to orange. Then, after what Jono would swear afterwards was a full minute and Keith said was eleven seconds, to green.

The laptop screen blinked. The little wheel stopped. The map came back. The green dot came back, lower, closer, much closer, half a mile now, and still coming.

And in the corner of the screen a small window opened, and Clifford's voice came out of the laptop, crackling, very calm, very American, as if he were reading out a baseball score.

"Hey, guys. Lost you for a second there. Satellite's got you now. You're good. Capsule's at four thousand feet, main chute's out, drift's north-east at two knots. Your splash is six hundred yards, bearing three-one-five. Go get it."

Keith pushed the throttles forward.

* * *

Jono saw the parachute before he saw anything else.

A pale shape against the black sky, coming down slowly, swinging. Big. Bigger than he had thought. Orange and white in stripes, caught in the boat's spotlight as Keith swung it up, a great soft dome with something small and dark hanging underneath it. It came down out of the dark the way snow comes down, without any sound at all.

It hit the water a hundred yards ahead of them. A splash, white in the spotlight. Then the parachute came down on top of it, slowly, and lay on the sea, collapsing, and the small dark thing bobbed up beside it and floated.

Keith brought the boat round. Slowly now. Gently. Jono had the boathook. He leaned out over the side, the way the man at Conwy had shown him on the jetty with a fender, and the swell

lifted the boat and dropped it, and lifted it, and he got the hook into the loop on the top of the capsule on the third go and held on.

It was the size of a big dustbin. A blunt cone, black underneath where it had burned, grey on top, warm. He could feel the warmth through the boathook. Steam was coming off it where the sea touched it, very faint, in the spotlight.

Together they got it alongside, and then, with a strap and a lot of swearing, half into the well at the back of the boat, wedged, rocking. Keith cut the parachute lines with a knife. The parachute drifted off into the dark like a jellyfish.

"Two thirty-one," said Jono, looking at his watch. He did not know why he said it. Because Jack would have.

Keith knelt by the capsule. There was a hatch on the top, with four big catches, and a laminated card zip-tied beside it with instructions in English and something that Jono thought was Japanese. Keith did not read the card. He undid the catches, one, two, three, four, in an order that was not the order on the card, and lifted the hatch.

* * *

Inside, in a cradle of grey foam, there was a stone.

That was what Jono thought, looking down at it in the spotlight. A stone. Smooth, dark grey, about the size and shape of a goose egg, a little flattened, with a dull sheen on it like slate after rain. It sat in its foam cradle and did not do anything. It did not glow or hum or flash. It looked like something you would pick up off Goodrington sands and put on a windowsill.

It had been parked in the sky for five months. It had made two of America's instruments go blank. It had sent a hundred-and-thirty-year-old code from a cider house in Winner Street down to the Atlantic once every ninety-six minutes. Jono looked at it and thought: *That's it?*

Keith reached into the hatch and put his hand on it.

Not to pick it up. Just his hand, his right hand, flat, laid on top of it, the way you would lay a hand on a dog's head, or on the bonnet of a car to see if it was warm.

And everything went quiet.

Jono would try for a long time to describe it, afterwards, and never manage it. It was not that the noise stopped. The engines were still ticking over. The sea was still slapping on the hull. The wind. But under all of it, there had been something else, all night, that he had not noticed until it was gone. A sort of pressure. A hum, below hearing, the way you don't notice a fridge until it switches off. And when Keith put his hand on the stone, it switched off.

Keith shut his eyes.

He knelt in the well of the boat in the dark, rocking on the swell, with one hand flat on a grey stone in a cradle of foam, and his eyes shut, and his face, in the spotlight, did something that Jono had only ever seen on one other face in his life. On Chris's face, in the back room at Widecombe Cot in 1995, at two in the morning, when he came down the passage and asked Jono for a pen.

The face of a man who has found a thing he has been looking for, for a very long time, and is not yet sure he is allowed to have it.

* * *

"Keith," said Jono, after a while. "We should go."

Keith did not move.

"Keith. Clifford says there's a patrol boat out of Holyhead doing a sweep in forty minutes. We should go."

"In a minute," said Keith.

Jono waited.

At ten to three he said it again, and Keith said *in a minute* again, and did not move.

At three, Jono got up and went to the console, and looked at the throttles, and the chart, and the compass, and thought, *I've driven a police van down Union Street on a Saturday night, how hard can it be*, and put the boat in gear, slowly, and turned it south-west towards the coast of Wales, and opened the throttles a little.

The boat moved. Not elegantly. It went. Keith knelt in the well of the boat with his hand on the stone in the open capsule, and the spray came over the stern and soaked him, and he did not take his hand away.

* * *

At half past three Jono took out his pocketbook, with one hand, steering with the other, and wrote it down. Sea slight. No moon. Capsule down. Recovered. Hand on it. *It is now 3.30. I have stopped asking.*

On the coast ahead the lights of Conwy were getting closer. Behind them the turbines went round in a long line, red lights blinking. Above them the stars were out, and there was nothing up there any more that did not move round with the others.

His phone buzzed in his lifejacket. Signal again. One message, from Chris, sent at 2.31 exactly, as if he had felt it.

Last song. Ania stopped in the middle of a line, looked at the ceiling for about ten seconds, then finished it. Nobody noticed but me. You all right?

Jono looked at it for a long time.

Then he typed with his thumb, slowly, the way he typed everything. *Got it. All fine. K. won't let go of it.*

He thought for a moment, and added: *Doesn't look like much.*

The answer came back while Conwy castle was coming up black against the sky.

Neither did the waybill.

Chapter 7 – *The Office*

Fri. 5 May 2028. The count, Westpoint, Exeter, 4.40 p.m. Robinson elected first Mayor of Devon and Torbay. Shook every hand in the hall. Saw me at the back. Smiled. Said: "You can put that away now, Hills." Did not.

The heat came at him off the tarmac at Changi at six in the morning like the door of an oven, and Keith stood at the top of the aircraft steps and let it.

He had forgotten. That was the thing he would remember about that morning, for as long as he was allowed to remember anything. He had lived in this heat for twenty-five years and come back to it a hundred times after, and he had forgotten what it did, the first time, in the chest. He had kept the city. He had kept the street names and the bus numbers and the smell of the drains in Joo Chiat. But the heat, the first touch of it, he had lost somewhere on the way down the line, and here it was again, handed back to him on the steps of a plane, the way you would hand a man a coat he did not know he had left behind.

"You OK?" said Clifford, behind him, with both their bags.

"Yes," said Keith. "It's hot."

Clifford looked at him strangely. Then he laughed. "Buddy, it's Singapore."

* * *

The last time Chris had come through this airport it was October 2018 and he had been going the other way, with the Tiger carton on the seat beside him and Basil waving at the barrier. Keith remembered that. He remembered the carton. He did not remember

what Basil had been wearing, and he stood in the arrivals hall for a moment, with the cold air from the vents on his wet shirt, trying to find it, and could not.

He had stopped minding. Mostly. You could not come down the line and keep everything; there was not room. Every time you moved a thing, it took a thing. You did not get to choose. A face here. A song there. The colour of a shirt at an airport barrier ten years ago. He had made a list, at the beginning, in 2057, in the little room at the top of the house in Torquay with the window that looked down over the bay, of what he would not let it have. Ten things. He had written them on the inside of his own eyelids, as near as he could, and checked them every morning since he arrived, the way an old man checks his pockets for his keys.

He checked them now, standing in the arrivals hall at Changi with Clifford waiting.

The song. The waybill. The lighthouse, and the counting. Mum's book. Jono at the bottom of the cellar stairs. Basil's left foot. The bootlace. Karen's hand on his collar on the platform at Torquay.

Eight. He counted again. Eight.

He did not know what the other two had been.

* * *

Ai Li met them on the pavement outside, by a taxi she had kept waiting with its engine running, and Keith saw her before she saw him, which was a habit, and then saw her see him, which was not.

She was forty-three. Small and quick and very straight, the black hair grown long now and tied back, in a dark linen shirt and the kind of trainers that cost more than a suit. She had been twenty-four the last time Chris had seen her come through a gate. She had looked round the arrivals hall at every face before she looked for him.

She did the same thing now. Every face on the pavement. The taxi drivers, the families, the security man, the businessmen with their phones. And then Clifford, whom she knew, and smiled at.

And then Keith.

She stopped smiling. Not unkindly. The way you stop when you have walked into a room and the furniture has been moved. She looked at him for a long time, there on the pavement in the heat, with the taxi ticking over beside her, and he let her, because he knew there was no point not letting her. She had been looking at people for a living since she was nineteen. She had put her hands on ten thousand hamstrings and told the owners of them about ankles they had turned at school and never mentioned.

"Clifford said you'd be a surprise," she said at last.

"I'm sorry."

"Don't be sorry. I just..." She shook her head, quickly, the way you shake water off. "You look like Basil."

He had not expected that. He felt it go in somewhere under his ribs.

"Do I?"

"You look like Basil's big brother," said Ai Li. "Or his..." She did not finish it. She looked at him a moment longer. Then she opened the door of the taxi. "Get in. It's thirty-two degrees. We'll talk at the office."

* * *

Joo Chiat had not changed. That was the first thing.

It had changed. Of course it had. There were new places along the main road with glass fronts and coffee at eight dollars, and the old cinema was a gym, and somebody had painted the shophouses on the side streets in colours the Peranakan aunties would never

have chosen, mint and lilac, for the tourists. But the shape of it was the same. The long terraces of shophouses, two storeys, with the five-foot way along the front under the upstairs rooms, and the painted tiles, and the shuttered windows, and the smell. Durian, joss sticks, drains, rain coming.

The taxi turned off the main road into a side street, and then another, and stopped.

Keith got out, and stood in the five-foot way, and looked.

There was a shop two doors along that sold mobile phone covers. Bright plastic, racks of them, a young man asleep behind the counter. It had been a shop that sold incense and paper offerings for the dead. Gold paper houses. Paper cars. Paper money for the bank of hell. An old couple had run it, and the old man had come out and shouted at a small boy kicking a ball against the wall, and the old woman had given a fair-haired woman a bowl of laksa and called her *anak*, and the woman had put her hand over her mouth and gone upstairs very fast.

He remembered all of that. Every bit. He had not put it on the list, and it had stayed anyway.

"It closed in 2014," said Ai Li, beside him. "The old lady died. The son didn't want it." She nodded at the door of the shophouse in front of them. "We're up here. Two doors down. Chris wanted it close."

"I know," said Keith.

She looked at him again. She did not ask.

* * *

The office was two rooms over a shophouse that sold hardware: hoses, buckets, brooms in a rack outside, a cat asleep on a sack of cement. Up a narrow stair at the back, through a steel door with three locks, and then a room with whitewashed walls and a

ceiling fan going round and the shutters closed against the heat, and six desks, and a wall of screens, and a long table, and a kettle.

There was always a kettle. Rage had never in a hundred and thirty years had a room without one.

A young woman at one of the desks looked up as they came in. Grace Tay's girl, from Ong's firm, Ai Li said, in on Tuesdays, and the girl nodded and went back to her screen. Nobody else. Basil, Ai Li said, was at the club. He came in Mondays and Thursdays. She said it watching Keith's face.

Keith kept his face still. He had had a long time to practise.

"Sit," said Ai Li. She put three cups out. "Clifford's told me some. Not all. He says you're a friend of Chris's. From before." She filled the kettle. "He says you're the one who held on to it."

"Yes."

"For an hour, Jono says. In a boat."

"Yes."

She plugged the kettle in. She stood with her back to it, with her arms folded, and looked at him.

"I'm not going to ask who you are," she said. "Chris would tell me if he wanted me to know, and he hasn't. So I'll ask you something else." She waited a moment. "Can you read it?"

* * *

He thought about how to answer that.

The truth was that he did not know. The truth was that in 2057 he had known everything about it, every layer, every function; he had sat in a white room in a building that did not yet exist and been shown how it worked by somebody who had never been born, and he had understood. And then he had come down the line, and the line had taken what it took, and he had woken up in this body in a

room above Bailey's on a wet night in April with a head full of holes.

He knew what it was. He knew what it did. He knew what it was *for*. When he put his hand on it in the boat he had felt it know him, the way a dog knows you after years away, and he had not been able to take his hand off. But to make it *do* anything, to read what it carried and send what it was meant to send, he needed the thing he had been told he would find here.

"Not yet," he said. "Not on my own. I was told you'd have something."

Ai Li looked at him for a long moment. Then she went to the steel cabinet in the corner of the room, and unlocked it with a key on a chain round her neck, and took out a black case the size of a paperback, and put it on the long table in front of him.

* * *

"It started in March," she said. "When Clifford sent me the burst. The one that said *Zider at Gran's*. He wanted a second pair of eyes. Our side. Not the partners'." She sat down across from him. "The partners decoded the letters and stopped. Because the letters made sense, and when people find a thing that makes sense, they stop looking." She tapped the case. "But the burst was longer than the letters. Much longer. There's a header, that's the code. And then there's ninety seconds of something else that everybody thought was noise. Carrier noise. Static."

"It's not static."

"No. It's not." She almost smiled. "I do commentary for e-sports. You know that? Four nights a week, Seoul, Shanghai, here. Arenas. Eighteen thousand kids screaming." She shrugged. "It's the best cover anybody in Rage ever had, Chris says. A booth above a crowd, paid to watch it. But the thing about e-sports is, the people who run it have more processing power than most governments.

Whole data centres. Rooms full of graphics cards, doing nothing between tournaments." She opened the case. Inside, in grey foam, like the stone in the capsule, sat a small black drive and a folded sheet of paper. "I borrowed some. Three weekends. Nobody noticed."

She unfolded the paper and turned it round.

It was a printout. Rows and rows of numbers, very small. And at the top, where the decoder had found the edge of the pattern and started to make sense of it, a single line of plain text.

Keith read it, and sat back in his chair.

It was not a message. It was not a word. It was a date, and a time, and a place, the way Jack wrote them, the way Jono wrote them, the way he had written them himself every day since a night in the back room at Widecombe Cot in 1995.

Thurs. 31 Oct. 1895. Bailey's, public bar. About 5 p.m.

"Is that what you were told you'd find?" said Ai Li.

He did not answer. He could not, for a moment.

"It goes on," said Ai Li. "After that. Thousands of lines. It's structured. It's like... a map, almost. Or an address book. A list of entries, each with a date and a place. I couldn't read past the first one. I don't know what any of it means." She closed the case and pushed it across the table to him. "But Clifford says you might."

* * *

The kettle boiled. Nobody got up.

Keith put his hand on the case. Not to open it. Just his hand, flat, on the lid, the way he had put it on the stone.

He knew what it was now. He had known, he thought, in the boat, with the spray coming over and Jono swearing at the throttles. *Only what was written down can be reached.* That was the first rule.

The first thing they had told him in the white room in 2057. You could not go to a moment that nobody had written down. You needed an entry. A page. A line in a pocketbook, a date on a waybill, a name in a register at a hotel with a monkey puzzle in the garden. Every written moment was a door, and the stone in its foam cradle in the cellar under Studio Ania was a thing that could find the doors.

And this was the address book.

A hundred and thirty years of Hills and Harveys and Mallyons, writing everything down. Every entry a door. And somebody, at some point, had gone through all of them, and listed them, and sent the list up into the sky to wait.

He did not know who. He was afraid that he did.

"Thank you," he said to Ai Li.

She looked at him, the way she looked at an injury nobody had told her about.

"You're shaking," she said.

"It's the heat," said Keith.

They walked to a hawker centre at the end of the road at one o'clock, Keith and Clifford, because Keith had said he wanted laksa, and Clifford had looked at him and said *you've been here before, huh*, and Keith had said yes.

He knew he was being followed before they reached the end of the street.

He did not know how. Sue had taught him how, but Sue's face was gone, and so was most of what she had said, and what was left was not in words any more. It was in the back of his neck. It was in the way the five-foot way went quiet behind him for one step too long. It was a shop window on the corner, a shop that sold wedding photographs, with big framed pictures of couples in white and red, and he stood in front of it for a moment looking at the brides, at the

right angle, and saw in the glass, across the road, under the awning of a shuttered shophouse, a woman.

Fair. Very still. A pale dress. A straw hat with a wide brim that put her face in shadow. Not looking at him. Looking at the street. The way somebody looks at a street when they are waiting for a particular person to come out of a particular door.

Keith did not turn round.

He stood in front of the wedding photographs, and looked at the brides, and felt the whole of the line go through him at once, from end to end, like a current. A bridge in Paris at midnight with the accordion playing. A bunk on a night train. A platform in Brussels at half past one. A lamp by a satay stall at the Kallang. A woman sitting on the end of a bed in the rue de la Roquette, saying *Yes. I did. I do. That is the true thing.*

He had not put her on the list either.

She had stayed.

"Keith?" said Clifford. "Laksa?"

"Yes," said Keith. "Go on ahead. Get a table. I'll be a minute."

He did not look at her. He did the thing Sue had taught him, the last lesson, the one that was still there when everything else she had taught him was gone, because he had done it to Sue herself in a hotel lobby in Bangkok in 1997 and you do not forget the hardest thing you ever did.

He looked straight through her.

He turned from the shop window and walked along the five-foot way towards the hawker centre at an ordinary pace, with his hands in his pockets, past the shuttered shophouse on the other side of the road, and his eyes went across the woman in the straw hat, and did not stop, and went on.

She was not looking at him. She was looking at the door of the office. Two doors down from where the incense shop used to be. Watching it the way you watch a door you know somebody comes out of on Mondays and Thursdays.

Basil's day was Thursday. It was Tuesday.

She would wait. She was very good at waiting.

He did not let her see his face. He knew, the way he knew the heat and the drains and the laksa, that she must not see it. Not yet. Not here. Not the face of a young man from the Coach and Horses in 1983, thirty years old on a pavement in Joo Chiat, forty-five years later, when he ought to be sixty-six.

He went on round the corner into the noise and the steam of the hawker centre, and found Clifford at a table, and sat down with his back to the wall where he could see the entrance, and Clifford pushed a bowl of laksa across to him and said, "You look like you saw a ghost."

"No," said Keith. "The other way round."

He ate the laksa. It was exactly as he remembered it. He was glad that had stayed.

When he went back past the shuttered shophouse at two, the woman in the straw hat had gone. On the step, under the awning, where she had been standing, there was a small paper cup from the coffee place on the main road, with a lid, untouched, still full.

He did not pick it up. He looked at it, and went on, and up the narrow stair, and through the steel door with three locks, and sat down at the long table with his hand on Ai Li's black case, and checked the list again.

Eight things. And one he had not put on it, that had not needed to be.

Chapter 8 – *Father*

Sun. 30 July 2028. Widecombe Cot, back room, 12 noon (7 p.m. Singapore). C.H. on the phone to Basil. Shut the door. Came out after nine minutes. Said: "He took it better than I did." Sat down. Did not drink his tea.

Basil had known for four days, and he had told nobody, and he had trained his under-nineteens twice and watched them lose once and eaten his dinner every night, and he had not slept properly since Sunday.

His father had rung at seven, the way he always rang. Sunday, seven o'clock Singapore time, noon in Torquay, every week for ten years, since the October his father went home. Basil had been on the balcony of the flat in Tiong Bahru with a beer, watching the rain come over the rain trees, and he had picked up on the second ring and said, "Dad," and his father had said, "Basil," and then not said anything at all for a long time.

That was how Basil knew it was something.

Chris Harvey did not do silences on the phone. He filled them. He told you about the forge and the weather and what Gran had said at breakfast and what Jono had said about what Gran had said. He talked the way a man talks who has spent too long in rooms on his own. When he went quiet on a phone line, it meant he was standing at the edge of something and looking over.

"There's somebody coming to the office this week," his father said at last. "With Clifford. Ai Li knows. She'll be there."

"OK."

"I need to tell you who he is. Before you meet him. Because if I don't, you'll work it out in about four seconds and then you'll be angry with me for not telling you, and you'll be right."

"Dad. Who is he?"

And his father told him.

It took nine minutes. Basil knew because he looked at the call timer afterwards, when the screen went dark, and sat on the balcony with the phone in his hand and the beer gone warm, watching the rain. Nine minutes. His father had tried to explain the inexplicable in nine minutes, haltingly, in short sentences, the way a policeman tells you somebody has died, with long gaps in which Basil could hear Widecombe Cot behind him: the range ticking, a door, Gran's radio somewhere upstairs.

At the end of it, Basil had said, "OK."

His father had said, "OK?"

"Yes. OK." Basil had looked out at the rain. "Dad. I've lived in this family for thirty-two years. I've watched Uncle Jono write down the weather at my own birthday party. I saw a lady at Tanjong Pagar who hasn't aged since 1895. Gran sends me a card every October that says *Miss Ania asked after you*." He laughed, a little, and it came out wrong. "What did you think I was going to say? *That's impossible*?"

There had been a long pause on the line.

"I thought you might say that," said his father. "I did."

* * *

So he had known for four days. And on Thursday morning, his office day, he went up the narrow stair at the back of the hardware shop at nine o'clock with a coffee in each hand, as he always did, one for him and one for Ai Li, and put his thumb on the reader and

his key in the second lock and his other key in the third, and pushed the steel door open with his shoulder.

And there he was.

At the long table. Sitting with his back to the wall, where you could see the door. A cup of tea in front of him, not touched. A small black case under one hand.

He looked up when the door opened.

Basil stood in the doorway with a coffee in each hand.

He had seen photographs. Of course he had. The albums at Gran's, the ones she got out at Christmas whether you wanted them or not. Dad at sixteen in a tie, starting at Fleet House. Dad at nineteen with a bad haircut outside a tower block in Stafford. Dad at twenty-five on a bridge in Paris, squinting, with somebody's shadow across the bottom of the frame that Basil had always known, without being told, was his mother taking it. Dad at thirty-one at Changi, in a suit far too heavy for the heat, squinting at the sun.

None of them were this.

A photograph is flat. A photograph does not lift its head. This was a man of about thirty, lean and dark and tired, in a white shirt, sitting at a table in Joo Chiat, and he lifted his head and looked at Basil, and the look went in through Basil's eyes and straight down into the floor of him, the way the floodlights at the Kallang used to come on, one bank at a time.

His father's face. His father's young face.

Younger than his own.

"Morning," said Basil. It was all he could find.

"Morning," said the man.

His voice. His father's voice, before the hoarseness. Before the stroke. Before sixty-six years.

Ai Li took her coffee from Basil's hand without a word, and went into the other room, and shut the door.

* * *

He sat down across the table. He did not know what else to do. He put his coffee down. He looked at the man and the man looked at him and neither of them said anything for long enough that it became a thing in itself, the silence, sitting at the table with them like a third person.

Basil had spent his life reading people. On pitches and in dressing rooms and on touchlines, in boardrooms when the club's owners came down, in the stands. Dad had taught him that, at the window in Tiong Bahru during SARS, with a dog in the street and a lady going the wrong way. *What do you see?* And Basil had been good at it from the start. Better than Dad, Dad said. He read the way his mother had read, Dad said once, and then had not said any more.

So he read the man.

Back to the wall. Exits clocked. Hands still on the table, one on the case, the other flat beside the cup. And eyes that were wrong. Not wrong. Older. Much older than the face around them. Older than Dad's. Basil had seen eyes like that once before, in a hospice in Bedok, on a Malay man called Rahim who had coached him when he was seven and taught him that God had given him his left foot. Rahim at sixty-four, thin as a rake from the chemotherapy, the week before he died, looking up from the bed at Basil with eyes that had already said goodbye to most of what they had ever looked at, and were taking their time over what was left.

"You're ninety-five," said Basil.

The man looked at him.

"Dad said. On the phone." Basil turned his coffee cup round on the table, a quarter turn, by the handle, and stopped, and looked at

his own hand. "He said you came back. From 2057. He said I wasn't to ask how."

"No."

"I wasn't going to." He let go of the cup. "Ninety-five. In that." He nodded at the face, the body. "What's it like?"

The man thought about it. He took his time. Basil liked him for that.

"Like wearing a coat that belongs to somebody you used to know," he said. "It fits. It's warm. Every so often you put your hand in a pocket and find something of theirs."

* * *

They talked for an hour. About nothing. That was the strange part, afterwards, when Basil went over it on the bus. They talked about the club. About the under-nineteens, and a boy from Pasir Ris with a right foot like a shotgun and no idea where it was going. About Ai Li's commentary, and the tournament in Seoul next month, and whether e-sports was a sport, which they disagreed about, mildly, and Basil realised partway through that they disagreed about it in exactly the same way that he and his father did, with exactly the same arguments, and that the man across the table knew all of his before he made them.

About the old flat in Tiong Bahru, which Basil still lived in. The spiral stair at the back. The rain trees. The hook by the door where his school bag used to go, which was still there. The man had smiled at that, a real smile, quick.

"You kept the hook."

"I couldn't get it out of the wall."

"You didn't try very hard."

"No," said Basil. "I didn't."

Nobody mentioned Basil's mother. Basil waited for it, all hour, and it did not come. The man did not say her name and Basil did not say it either, and it sat with them at the table the way the silence had, a fourth person now, very quiet, with a cup of tea she did not drink.

Basil thought about the stand behind the dugout at the club. About the last few weeks. About a fair woman in a straw hat three rows back, very still, who had come to two matches and a training session, and whom he had told himself was a scout from one of the Malaysian clubs, and had not looked at directly, because something in him had said *don't*.

He did not mention her either.

* * *

At ten o'clock Ai Li knocked on the inside door and put her head round and said Basil had a call at half past from the club about the Bedok ground, and did he want her to move it.

"No," said Basil. "I'll take it."

She went. The door closed.

Basil looked at the man across the table. He had been holding the question all hour. All four days. He had had it since the balcony on Sunday, since before that, maybe: since Tanjong Pagar, since he was fifteen with a stepladder, watching a lady in grey look up the line. He had not known how to ask it. He still did not. So he just asked it.

"What happens to me?"

The man did not move.

He did not look away. He did not look down at his tea, or at the case under his hand, or at the shuttered window. He looked at Basil, straight, steadily, with those old eyes in the young face, for a long time.

And Basil saw it in him. Saw him know. All of it. Thirty years of it, the whole of the rest of Basil's life, laid out behind those eyes the way a pitch is laid out from the top of the stand, every line and every player, and where the ball goes, and who is standing where when it gets there. Saw him know and saw him decide.

"If I tell you," said the man, "you will do it differently."

* * *

It went into Basil like cold water.

Not the words. The words were fine. Reasonable. The kind of thing anybody might say. It was the way he said them. Every word the same length. Set down in the air, one after another, like somebody laying a table. Not his father's voice at all, suddenly, for those eight words. Somebody else's.

Basil knew that voice.

He had heard it on his phone, at two in the morning, in the dark in the flat in Tiong Bahru, more times than he would ever tell anybody. Videos of a band from Torbay, off the internet, that his father played guitar in. A woman in a grey costume standing very straight at the front of a stage in a pub, with her hands at her sides, singing, if it was singing. Setting each word down. Basil had watched those videos the way other people watched the sea. He did not know why. He had a feeling, watching them, that he had heard that voice before, a long time ago, before he could remember. A voice at a window, maybe, at a hospital, on the day he was born. A voice on the end of a platform, sixty yards away, that he had not been close enough to hear.

If I tell you, you will do it differently.

The man across the table was watching him hear it.

"That's hers," said Basil. "That's not yours. That's Ania's."

The man was quiet for a moment.

"She said it to me," he said. "In October 1992. At a table in a bay window in Torquay. About Singapore." Something moved at the corner of his mouth. "He never forgot it. Neither did I. It's one of the ones I kept."

"Kept?"

"I'll tell you about that another time."

"Will you?"

"No," said the man. "Probably not."

And Basil laughed. He could not help it. It came out of him short and surprised, the way it came out when one of the under-nineteens did something stupid and brilliant at the same time. And the man laughed too, quietly, with his head down, and for a moment, across the long table, in the whitewashed room with the fan going round, they were two men laughing at the same thing in the same way, and it did not matter which of them was older.

* * *

At the door, at twenty-five past ten, with his bag on his shoulder and the call from the club already buzzing in his pocket, Basil stopped.

"What do I call you?"

"Keith," said the man.

Basil stood very still in the doorway.

There had been a card on the fridge in Tiong Bahru. A long time ago. In crayon. A stick man with a camera, and a stick boy with a ball, and big uneven letters across the top in red, because red was his favourite, because Singapore played in red. *KEITH.* He had been four. He had found it in his father's passport, the name in the middle that nobody ever used, and thought it was the funniest thing in the world. His father had laughed and laughed and stuck it on the fridge

with a magnet shaped like a durian, and it had stayed there until Basil was thirteen, and then one day it had gone, and he had never asked where.

"Dad kept that card," said Basil. "Didn't he."

"For years."

"Where did it go?"

"I don't know," said Keith. "I've lost it." He looked at the table. "I'd like to know too."

* * *

He took the call on the stair. Something about the pitch at Bedok and the drainage and the groundsman's back. He said yes and no and Thursday and he would look at it. Then he went down, through the hardware shop, past the cat on the cement, out into the five-foot way and the heat.

He did not go to the club. Not straight away. He walked to the bus stop on the main road and sat on the bench and let two buses go by.

Then he took a notebook out of his bag.

It was a small black one with an elastic band. His father had given it to him on his eighteenth birthday, at the table in Tiong Bahru, with a pen of his own. *Start now*, his father had said. *The date. The time. The weather. What you saw, and what you were told, and who told you. Not what you felt.* And then, after a moment: *Uncle Jono's grandad's rule. And his father's. And your gran's.*

Basil had not started it. He had carried it for fifteen years in the bottom of every bag he owned, empty, the way his father had carried Douglas's for seven. He had known, the way you know things in this family, that it would start when it needed to.

He opened it at the first page.

He sat on the bench at the bus stop on Joo Chiat Road in the heat, with the traffic going by and a woman beside him eating curry puffs out of a paper bag, and he wrote, in the hand he had, which was neater than his father's and less like anybody else's:

Thurs. 3 Aug. 2028. Joo Chiat, the office, 9 a.m. to 10.25. Hot. Rain coming. Met my father. He is younger than me. Asked him what happens to me. He said: "If I tell you, you will do it differently." Ania's words. Ania's voice.

He looked at it for a long time.

Then, underneath, smaller, because it was the rule and because it was true, he wrote:

Have written it down.

The next bus came. He got on it. He did not look back at the office, or at the shuttered shophouse across the road from it, where there was nobody under the awning this morning, nobody at all.

Chapter 9 – *The Stand*

Sat. 12 Aug. 2028. Preston, 4.50 p.m. (11.50 p.m. Singapore). Text from Basil. Five words: "She came. I said no." Rang him. He didn't pick up. Texted back: "Write it down." He wrote back: "Already have."

Karina Petrick had watched her son play football from the stands of eleven different grounds in six countries over twenty years, and he had never once known she was there.

Until this summer.

She knew the moment it had changed. A Saturday in June, the under-nineteens at home to a Malaysian academy side, a nothing match, three hundred people in a stand built for two thousand. She had been where she always was, three rows behind the dugout, a little to the left, in a hat, very still. Very still was the thing. People who move are seen. People who are perfectly still become part of the stand, like a post or a seat. She had learned that in a house on the Elbchaussee before she could read.

And at half time, walking back to the dugout from the tunnel with a clipboard under his arm, her son had stopped. In the middle of the track. And turned his head. Not towards her. Towards the empty seats beside her, along the row, the way you look along a platform.

His father's trick. The platform game.

His eyes had come along the row, seat by seat, the way they had been taught, and stopped one seat short of her. And stayed there, on the empty seat, for perhaps two seconds. And then he had turned away and gone into the dugout and not looked at the stand again for the rest of the match.

She had known then. He had not let himself see her. He had stopped one seat short on purpose. That was a thing you could only do if you already knew who was in the next seat.

She had not come back for three weeks. Then she had come back, because she could not not.

* * *

The ground at Bedok was a bowl of concrete with a running track round it and a single covered stand along the west side, and the floodlights came on at seven, one bank at a time, with a long electrical sigh, as the sun went down red behind the flats.

She sat three rows behind the dugout, a little to the left. Pale linen dress. Straw hat, wide brim. Sunglasses, though the sun had gone. Hands in her lap.

He was in the technical area in front of her, in a club tracksuit, standing. He did not sit when he coached. He stood at the edge of the white line with his arms folded and watched, and every so often he unfolded one arm and pointed, and a boy on the pitch would move three yards to the left without being told why, and two minutes later the ball would arrive exactly where he had moved to.

Thirty-two. Thirty-three in a fortnight. Tall, like his father. Lean. Her colouring, which she had been afraid of when he was born and had come to be glad of. Her eyes, people said, though she did not think so; she thought he had his father's way of using them, which mattered more than the colour. He watched the pitch the way Chris had watched platforms. Not where the ball was. Where it was going to be.

She had watched him do it at seven, on a field in the east, in a kit that came down to his knees. At twelve, at the academy, putting a ball in the top corner from thirty yards with his left foot while the coach swore with delight. At fifteen, on a school pitch in Queenstown, going past three women as if they were not there, and

a girl with a plait telling him to grow up. At nineteen, in his first professional match, coming on with eleven minutes left and touching the ball twice. At twenty-six, the night of his knee, when he went down on the halfway line at Jalan Besar and did not get up, and she had stood up in the stand, which she never did, and then sat down again before anybody saw.

And every time, afterwards, she had gone home and written it down. The date, the ground, the score. What he did. In a small black notebook that she had bought, the first one, in a stationer's in Stoke in 1983, because a boy in the Coach and Horses had told her that his family wrote everything down, and she had wanted, very much, to know what that was like.

Nobody in Hamburg had ever known about the notebooks. Nobody in Torbay knew now. There were twenty-two of them. They were the only thing she owned that had not been given to her by somebody who wanted something.

* * *

The under-nineteens won two-one. The winner came in the eighty-eighth minute from a boy from Pasir Ris with a right foot like a shotgun, and her son did not celebrate. He turned round, at the whistle, with his arms still folded, and looked up into the stand.

At her.

Not one seat short. Not along the row. Straight up, three rows, a little to the left, into the shadow under her hat. And held it.

Karina did not move.

She sat with her hands in her lap and her son looked at her across three rows of empty orange seats under the floodlights, and the whole of the line went through her, from end to end. A drawer lined with towels in a room above an incense shop. The first night he slept through. Thirteen candles on a cake at breakfast, on the morning she took the teapot. A crayon card on a fridge with a stick

man on it and four letters she had laughed at, and taken, years later, when she left, because it was the only thing in that flat that had her son's hand on it and she had not been able to leave it.

He looked away first. He turned and said something to his assistant, and handed him the clipboard, and walked off down the tunnel.

She knew where he was going. He was going round. Out of the tunnel, along the back of the stand, to the gate she would have to come out of.

She knew because his father had done exactly the same thing at the Kallang in 1994, and she had been waiting for him under a lamp.

* * *

He was by the gate. Not under a lamp. By the turnstiles, in his tracksuit, with his hands in his pockets, in the half-dark, where the floodlights did not reach. People were going past him in twos and threes, parents, players' girlfriends, a man selling drinks from a cool box. He did not look at any of them. He was looking at the stairs she would come down.

She came down them.

She stopped a yard from him. She took off the sunglasses. She did not take off the hat.

"Hello, Basil," she said.

"Mama."

His voice did not do anything. It was perfectly steady. She was proud of that and it went into her like a knife.

They stood there. People went past. The floodlights began to go off behind them, one bank at a time, with that long electrical sigh.

"You've been coming since June," said Basil.

"Before June. Since you were seven."

He took that. She watched him take it. Something went across his face and was put away.

"I didn't know that."

"No. You weren't meant to."

"Why now?"

She had thought about that. She had had a long time to think about it. She had written the answer in the twenty-second notebook, the night before, and crossed it out, and written it again.

"Because there is a place for you," said Karina.

* * *

He did not say anything. He waited. His father's waiting.

"In the family," she said. "My family. The one I come from, and you come from." She kept her voice low and even. "It is very old, Basil. Older than Rage. It has been in Hamburg and London and Paris and here, and in Torbay since before there were trams. It needs somebody. It will need somebody soon. Somebody with the blood, and the eyes, and the patience." She paused. "Somebody who knows how to watch a pitch and see where the ball is going to be."

"And do what?"

"Decide," said Karina. "Where it goes."

He looked at her for a long time under the last floodlight.

"Like Gran's old lady in the grey coat," he said. "In the shelter. In 1943. Like her."

So he had read it. Wendy's book. Of course he had. They would have given it to him at eighteen, the way they gave

everybody everything in that family, at a long table, with a pot of tea.

"Yes," said Karina. "Like her."

"Your grandmother."

"Yes."

"Is she still alive?"

Karina did not answer that.

Basil nodded slowly, as if she had.

"Come with me," said Karina. "Not tonight. Not tomorrow. When you are ready. There is a place for you. There has always been a place for you. I have kept it." She did not let her voice change. "It is the only thing I have ever kept for anybody."

* * *

He did not answer at once. He looked down at the ground between them, at the concrete, at a crushed paper cup in the gutter by the turnstile. Then he looked up.

"No," he said.

Just that. Quite gently. Not angry. The way his father had said it, at a table in a bay window in a book she had read, to a woman who had offered him a door.

She had known he would say it. She had written that in the notebook too, the night before. *He will say no.* And under it: *Good.*

She did not argue. She did not say any of the things she had been told to say, by the people who had sent her, about what the family could give him and what it could take away. She had never once in her life said those things to anybody she loved. She had said them to a great many people she did not.

"All right," she said.

He looked surprised. That was the first thing she had seen in him all evening that he had not meant to show.

"That's it?"

"That's it."

"You're not going to tell me what happens if I don't?"

"No," said Karina. "If I tell you, you will do it differently."

He went very still.

She saw it go into him. She did not know why. She did not know that he had heard those words, in that order, four days ago, across a long table in Joo Chiat, from a man with his father's face. She only saw that they had landed somewhere, and that he was looking at her now as if she had said something in a language he had not known she spoke.

"Where did you get that?" said Basil.

"Get what?"

He looked at her a moment longer. Then he shook his head.

"Nothing. Goodnight, Mama."

"Goodnight, Basil."

He turned and walked back towards the tunnel, and did not look back. He did not look back. She noticed that. She had taught him that, at least, though she had not been there to do it.

* * *

She went out through the turnstile into the car park.

It was dark now, properly dark, the floodlights all off and only the lamps along the edge of the car park lit, yellow, with insects round them. Cars pulling out. Parents calling to boys. A drinks stall by the far gate, a man with a cool box and a striped umbrella, packing up under a lamp.

And standing by the stall, under the lamp, with a can of something in his hand, not drinking it, a young man in a white shirt.

She stopped.

He was forty yards away. He was not looking at her. He was looking at the tunnel, at the gate where her son had gone back in. The way a man stands outside a hospital waiting for somebody to come out.

The lamp was on his face.

Karina stood in the middle of the car park at Bedok with her sunglasses in her hand and did not breathe.

* * *

The Coach and Horses. Hanley. June 1983. A Thursday evening, the ninth, the day of the election. A table by the window, a glass of white wine, a book she was not reading. The door had opened and a girl with curly hair had come in, a girl who noticed everyone, and put her hand on the arm of the young man beside her. *Your clever student's here.*

And the young man had looked up. Across the bar. At her.

Twenty-one. Thin. Dark-haired. A telephone engineer with a slightly bad haircut and good eyes, who had shown a group of students round a telephone exchange that morning and talked about it as if it were a cathedral. Who looked at a room the way nobody else she had met in England looked at a room. Along it, not at it. Who she had been sent to the Polytechnic in Stoke to find.

She had found him.

She had stood beside him at the bar twenty minutes later and said *thank you for this morning*. She had known that face for forty-five years. She had watched it on a bridge in Paris at midnight, singing. On a pillow in the dark on the rue de la Roquette. Asleep in the top bunk of a night train with her head on its chest. Under a

lamp at the Kallang, wet-eyed, saying *don't go*. Bent over a drawer lined with towels, counting fingers.

She had watched it get older. She had watched it from stands and car parks and hotel lobbies for twenty years, getting older, greyer, a stroke pulling one side of it down a little, and she had kept a notebook about that too.

And there it was. Under a lamp by a drinks stall in a car park in Bedok. Thirty years old. Unchanged. As if somebody had gone back into 1992 and lifted it out and brought it here.

It was not a likeness. She knew likenesses. She had grown up in a house where the woman at the head of the table had looked forty for sixty years. She knew exactly what it looked like when a face was being kept. This was not that.

This was him.

* * *

He turned his head.

Not towards her. Along the car park. Along the row of lamps, lamp by lamp, the way you look along a platform. And his eyes came along, and along, and reached her, standing in the middle of the tarmac in a pale dress with her sunglasses in her hand.

And did not stop.

They went across her, and on, to the next lamp, and the next. As if she were not there. As if she were a post, or a seat in a stand. As if he had been taught, by somebody very good, a long time ago, the hardest thing anybody ever learns: to see somebody, and not see them.

Then he put the can down on the edge of the drinks stall, untouched, and turned, and walked away out of the far gate into the dark, with his hands in his pockets, at an ordinary pace, and did not look back.

* * *

Karina stood in the car park until the man with the cool box had gone and the last car had pulled out and the lamps were the only light.

Then she went to her own car, and got in, and shut the door, and sat with her hands on the wheel.

They were shaking. She looked at them. She had not seen her hands shake since a platform in Brussels at half past one in the morning, in 1987, when she had turned from the man in the hat and looked up at a train window and seen an eye close.

She thought about the man in the window at Bailey's.

Nobody, Steve had said. *No name, no records, not one thing.* And she had said to Mary, from the hall, *nobody is ever nobody*, and sent a man with a gun to see what would happen if somebody tried, and a Hills had stopped it, because there was always a Hills.

She had not seen his face. She had seen a report. A blurred frame from a phone in the crowd, the back of a dark head at a window table. A young man who had turned up from nowhere on the night the hotel opened and sat where the tram conductor used to sit, and sent every instrument the family owned into silence.

She took her phone out of her bag.

There was a number in it that she had rung four days ago, from the house above Daddyhole Plain, and given a description, and the only photograph there was, and a city, and a date. A woman's number. A woman who was charming and quick and very good, and who would be in Singapore by the end of next week, and would find the young man from nowhere in a bar, and have a drink with him, and be gone by morning.

Karina looked at the number for a long time.

She did not ring it.

Not because she had decided not to. She had not decided anything. She sat in a dark car in Bedok with a phone in her shaking hand and the whole of her life going through her, end to end, and did not know, for the first time since she was a child in a cold house on the Elbchaussee, what she was going to do.

She put the phone face down on the passenger seat.

She sat there until midnight. Then she started the car and drove to the hotel, and went up to her room, and took out the twenty-second notebook, and wrote the date, and the ground, and the score.

Two-one. Winner in the 88th. He did not celebrate. He looked at me.

And then, underneath, after a long time:

Saw C. in the car park. Thirty. He looked through me.

She looked at it.

Then she crossed out *C.*, very carefully, one neat line, and did not write anything in its place.

Chapter 10 – *The Heavenly Moon*

> *Fri. 18 Aug. 2028. Preston, 2 p.m. Asked C.H. if Tan knows who K. is. C.H. said: "Tan knows everything that can be put in a spreadsheet. K. can't." Asked if that was a yes or a no. He said: "It's a Tan."*

The Heavenly Moon was on the twenty-fourth floor of a hotel on Orchard Road that had been the tallest building in Singapore in 1973 and was now, Clifford reckoned, about the four hundredth.

You went up in a lift with brass doors and a carpet on the floor, and the doors opened onto a room that had not been told the seventies were over. Red velvet booths in a long curve under windows that went from floor to ceiling. Gold lamps on the tables with fringed shades. A bar of black lacquer with a mirror behind it, and a barman in a white jacket who had been there, Tan said, since 1981. And at the far end, on a little round stage, a woman in a green silk dress singing Cantonese love songs from the sixties to a pianist who looked as if he had been there since 1973.

Below the windows, all of Singapore. The lights going out to the horizon, the towers at Marina Bay, the ships in the Strait like a city on the water.

"My father brought me here," said Tan. "Once. In 1974. I was nine. He had sold the last of the rubber in Malacca and he wanted me to see what a man could buy with money. We sat in that booth." He nodded at a booth by the window. "He had a whisky and I had an orange juice and the lady sang, and my father did not say one word to me for an hour. Then he said, *Remember this. This is what they take from you. The view.*" He turned his glass on the table. "I bought the hotel in 2009. I kept this room exactly as it was. My

managers think I am sentimental." He smiled very slightly. "I am not sentimental. I am keeping a promise to a man who was robbed."

Clifford liked him. He had liked him on the phone and he liked him more in person. A neat, quiet man of sixty-three in a white shirt with no tie, who listened more than he talked and did not seem to blink very often, and who had looked at Keith when they sat down for exactly as long as it took to read a page, and then not looked at him again in any way that anybody could have noticed.

Except Clifford. Clifford noticed. That was his job tonight. Chris had rung him in the afternoon and said, *Watch him. Not Tan. Keith. He doesn't sleep. He doesn't eat unless somebody puts food in front of him. He's in a body that's not used to him yet. Watch him.*

So Clifford watched.

* * *

They talked about Torbay for an hour.

Tan did most of it, in his careful English, with the numbers in his head. Bailey's was full until Christmas. The forge had its Lottery grant and three more apprentices. The White Rock firm had got the Debenhams building through committee by one vote, and two of the councillors who had voted against it had been seen on the Wednesday having lunch at the Imperial with a woman from Jersey. Vicky had sent him the photographs.

"Vicky leads it," said Tan. "All of it. My commitment to Torbay is fifteen years, and it is in her hands. Not mine. I have told my board. If they want to stop it, they must remove her first, and they will not, because she is better than any of them." He drank a little of his tea. "She asked me last week whether I would sell Bailey's."

Clifford looked up. "Sell it?"

"Somebody has offered. Through a bank in Jersey. Three times what it cost to build. The week after the gun." Tan put his cup down. "I told her to tell them no. I told her to tell them in exactly those words. *Mr Tan says no.* Nothing else." He looked out at the lights. "When I was nine years old I watched my father sell forty acres to a man who said the price was fair. It was not fair. It was a man who knew the price was going to rise because he was going to make it rise." He shook his head. "I do not sell to people who offer three times what a thing is worth. They are not buying the thing. They are buying the room it stands in."

Keith had said nothing all this time. He sat in the corner of the booth with his back to the window and a pot of tea in front of him that he had not poured, and listened. Once, when Tan said *Vicky*, something moved at the corner of his mouth. Once, when Tan said *Jersey*, he turned the empty cup in front of him a quarter turn on its saucer.

Tan saw that. Clifford saw Tan see it.

"You do that the way Chris does it," said Tan.

Keith looked at him.

"The cup," said Tan. "Chris turns his cup when he is thinking about something he does not want to say. I have had dinner with him nine times. He has done it every time somebody says a name he does not like." He looked at Keith steadily, with those eyes that did not blink very often. "You are related to Chris."

"Closely," said Keith.

Tan waited. Keith did not say anything else.

Tan nodded, slowly, as if that were a complete answer and he had expected nothing more. Then he poured Keith's tea for him, without asking, the way you would for an older man, and pushed the cup an inch towards him across the table.

"Then you will drink this," he said. "Chris never does either."

* * *

The woman in the green dress finished a song about a moon over a river, and the room clapped politely, and in the gap after the clapping somebody slid into the booth next to the one behind them and said, in English, "Oh God, is this the place with the lady? It is, isn't it? My boss said you couldn't come to Singapore and not."

Clifford turned his head.

She was about forty. English. Dark hair cut in a short bob, a navy dress, a lot of silver bracelets that made a sound when she moved her hands, which was often. A pretty, quick, open face, the kind that was halfway into a smile before it knew what it was smiling at. She had a glass of white wine and a phone and a lanyard from a conference that she was taking off and stuffing into her bag.

She caught Clifford looking and laughed. "Sorry. Am I loud? I'm loud. Three days of maritime insurance at the Marina Bay Sands and I've gone feral." She held out a hand over the back of the booth, bracelets jangling. "Lynda. With a Y, my mum was being creative."

"Clifford."

"American. God, it's a whole UN in here." She looked past him at Tan, and smiled politely, and then at Keith.

And held it. Not long. A second. A second and a half. The way people look at somebody attractive across a room, Clifford thought, and then thought, *no, not quite like that*.

"And you're English too," she said to Keith. "Don't tell me. South. West? You've got a Devon thing in your vowels."

"Torquay," said Keith.

"No! Stop it. My nan was in Paignton! Preston, actually, the bit behind the beach. We used to go every summer. Crabbing off the

pier." She laughed. "Small world. Do you know the Albion? Is that still there?"

"No," said Keith. "It burned."

"Oh no. Oh, that's sad." She turned her glass. "Nan used to say it was haunted. Something about the old station square. I can't remember." She looked at Keith again, with that open, interested face. "What's your name?"

"Keith."

"Keith. You don't look like a Keith."

"No."

"Nobody does, these days." She grinned. "Well, Keith who doesn't look like a Keith, from Torquay, I am going to get the next round, because I have expenses and nobody to spend them on, and you all look far too serious for a place with a lady in a green dress."

* * *

Clifford would go over it afterwards, many times. In a plastic chair in a corridor that smelled of disinfectant. On the plane home. In the cellar under Studio Ania with Jono sitting on the bottom stair and his pocketbook open on his knee, asking him to start again from the beginning, and again.

What had he seen?

He had seen a woman who was charming and quick and a little bit drunk and a little bit lonely, at the end of a conference, in a hotel bar, talking to strangers. He had seen a hundred women like that in a hundred hotel bars. He had been the American in a hundred of those booths.

He had seen that she was too interested.

That was all. That was the only thing. Not in him. Not in Tan, who she smiled at politely and talked past. In Keith. She asked

Keith where he was staying, and he said with friends, and she said *oh, nice*, and asked where, and he said in the east, and she let it go. She asked him what he did, and he said not much, and she laughed and said *that's the best job*, and let that go too. She asked if he was on Instagram, because she was terrible, she put everything on there, her nan's cat and her lunch, and he said no, and she said *very mysterious*, and held up her phone, laughing, and said *go on then, one photo, for my nan, Torquay boy in the Heavenly Moon*, and Keith put his hand up in front of his face before she had got the phone level, quite gently, the way you would put a hand up to stop a door closing, and she laughed and put the phone down and said *fine, fine, a man of mystery*.

She did not try again.

Clifford noticed that. He would think about it later. A woman who put everything on Instagram, and asked once, and when the answer was no, did not ask twice. Did not sulk, or tease, or try to sneak one when Keith looked away. Just put the phone face down on the table and did not touch it again all evening.

As if she had not needed the photograph. As if she had only needed to see what he did when she asked.

* * *

The drinks came. She had ordered them herself, at the bar, leaning on the lacquer and talking to the barman in the white jacket, who laughed at something she said. A whisky for Clifford, because he had said he liked whisky. A green tea for Tan, because he had said he did not drink. And for Keith, in a tall glass, pink, with a cherry and a slice of pineapple and a paper umbrella:

"A Singapore Sling," said Lynda, setting it down in front of him. "You have to. It's the law. I looked it up."

"They were invented at Raffles," said Tan. "Not here."

"Well, it's the thought." She smiled at Keith. "Go on. One. For Nan."

And Keith looked at her.

Clifford saw it. A long look. Longer than he had looked at anybody all evening except Tan. Not hostile. Not suspicious, exactly. The look of a man going through a drawer for something he is sure he put there and cannot find. Clifford had seen him do it at Changi, in the arrivals hall, and on the five-foot way in Joo Chiat, and in the cellar under Studio Ania, looking at the screens. A man checking a list, and finding a gap where something should be.

Then he picked up the glass, and drank.

Not all of it. About half. Then he put it down, and took the paper umbrella out, and turned it in his fingers, and looked at Lynda again, and said, "Thank you."

"There," said Lynda. "Was that so terrible?"

"No," said Keith.

* * *

She stayed for one more song. The lady in the green dress sang something slow, and Lynda swayed a little in the booth with her eyes half shut, and her bracelets made a sound against the table. Then she looked at her phone and said, *oh God, is that the time*, and that she had a flight at some ungodly hour, and gathered up her bag and her lanyard and her wine glass, which was still half full, and stood up.

She shook Tan's hand, and Clifford's. She did not shake Keith's. She stood at the end of the booth for a moment and looked at him, and the open, interested face did something that Clifford would not be able to describe afterwards, not even to Jono. Not a change. A stillness, behind the face. As if somebody had stopped moving in a house where all the lights were on.

"Look after yourself, Keith who doesn't look like a Keith," she said.

"And you," said Keith.

And she went. Across the red carpet, past the bar, a wave to the barman in the white jacket, into the lift with the brass doors. Clifford watched the numbers go down over the doors. Twenty-three. Twenty-two. Ground.

The lady in the green dress started another song.

Tan was looking at the door of the lift. He had not said anything for a long time.

"She did not finish her wine," he said at last.

"She had a flight," said Clifford.

"Yes," said Tan. "She said." He looked at Keith's glass, half full, pink, with the cherry still at the bottom. Then at Keith. Then he took a white handkerchief out of his pocket, very neat, folded, and laid it over the top of the glass, and slid the glass to the side of the table, and said to the barman, without raising his voice, "Please do not clear this one."

The barman, who had been there since 1981, nodded, and did not ask why.

* * *

They left at half past eleven. Tan's driver took them down Orchard Road and out east, through the lit streets, the shopping centres closing, the night markets opening, to the corner of Joo Chiat Road. Keith sat in the back with his head against the window and said nothing. Clifford watched him in the reflection in the glass.

He looked tired. That was all. A young man who had been up since six, in the heat, in a body that was not used to him, and had sat

for three hours in a velvet booth and drunk half a cocktail. He looked tired.

At the door of the hardware shop, under the five-foot way, with the cat asleep on the sacks and the rain starting, Clifford said, "You OK?"

"Yes."

"You looked at her funny. When she brought the drink."

Keith was quiet for a moment.

"I thought I knew her," he said. "I thought she was on a list. Something I'd been told to remember." He put his hand on the door. "I couldn't find it."

"A list of what?"

Keith looked at him. Then he smiled, a little, tiredly, the way Chris smiled at the end of a long day in the cellar when the screens had all gone quiet.

"Goodnight, Clifford."

He went up the narrow stair. Clifford heard the three locks. Then nothing.

* * *

Clifford did not sleep.

He lay in the spare room of the office in a camp bed with the fan going round and the rain on the shutters and his grandfather in his head. He did not know why his grandfather. A big man in Dayton, Ohio, with a bad shoulder, at the kitchen table, telling a story that Grandma rolled her eyes at. *Somebody grabbed my collar in the water at Utah Beach and pulled me up the sand. A woman. In a grey suit.* And then, always, at the end, as if it were the moral: *You watch out for the ones who come up close, Cliff. The ones who*

come up close and smile. They're either saving you or they're the other thing. And you don't get long to tell.

At half past twelve he got up and found the card Lynda had pressed into his hand at some point in the evening, between songs, with a laugh. *In case you're ever in Kent. Ha.* A business card. Maritime insurance. A name, a firm, a mobile number.

He rang the number.

A tone. Then a recorded voice, a woman's, polite, in English: *The number you have dialled has not been recognised.*

He stood in the dark in the spare room with the phone in his hand for a long time.

He would ring her hotel at seven the next morning, from somewhere he did not yet know he would be, and be told that the guest in question had checked out at four, paid in cash, and left no forwarding address. And that her room had been cleaned already, and there was nothing in it at all. Not a receipt. Not a hair. Not a fingerprint on a glass.

As if nobody had ever been there.

Chapter 11 – *Gall Bladder*

Fri. 18 Aug. 2028. Preston, 9.40 p.m. Text from Clifford (4.40 a.m. his time): "K. in SGH. Stable now. B. with him." Rang C.H. He was at the long table, dressed. Said he'd had a pain under his ribs on the right at ten to six, in the middle of his tea, and known. Did not ask how. Neither did he.

Clifford heard him fall at ten to one.

He was still standing in the dark in the spare room with the phone in his hand and the dead tone in his ear, *the number you have dialled has not been recognised*, when something hit the floor in the next room. Not loud. A soft heavy sound, the sound of a sack of something being put down too fast. Then nothing.

He went through. The office was dark, only the screens on standby glowing blue along the far wall, the fan going round. Keith was on the floor between the long table and the kettle, on his side, with his knees drawn up, very still.

"Keith. Hey. Keith."

He was awake. That was the first thing. His eyes were open. He was looking at the leg of the table a foot from his face with an expression of great concentration, as if it were a problem he had nearly solved. He was sweating. His shirt was soaked through. And he had one hand pressed flat to his right side, under the ribs, hard, the way you press on a door to keep something out.

"Where does it hurt?"

Keith moved his eyes to Clifford. It took him a long time.

"Here," he said. He did not move the hand. "It's all right. It's only here."

"I'm calling an ambulance."

"No names," said Keith. "Not the real one. There isn't a real one."

"I know, buddy. I know. Lie still."

* * *

The ambulance came in eleven minutes. Two paramedics, quick and kind and unhurried, the way Singapore did things, who did not ask why a man of thirty was lying on the floor of an office over a hardware shop at one in the morning with an American kneeling beside him. They got him onto a stretcher and down the narrow stair, which was not built for stretchers, and out through the hardware shop, past the cat on the sacks, who woke and watched with its eyes like lamps, and into the back of the ambulance under the five-foot way, in the rain.

Clifford rang Basil from the ambulance. He did not think about it. He had the number because Ai Li had given it to him, *for emergencies*, and this was one.

Basil answered on the first ring, the way people do who have been lying awake.

"It's Clifford. It's Keith. We're going to the General."

There was a pause. Two seconds. Then Basil's voice, very calm, very level, his father's voice when his father had been told something terrible on the phone:

"I'll be there before you."

He was.

* * *

The Singapore General Hospital at two in the morning was a long bright corridor and a smell of disinfectant and a lot of people in plastic chairs waiting for news, the way every hospital is at two in

the morning in every city in the world. Basil was standing at the door of Accident and Emergency when the ambulance pulled in, in a tracksuit with his car keys still in his hand, and he walked beside the trolley down the corridor with one hand on the rail, not touching Keith, just the rail, the whole way.

They took Keith through a pair of doors. A nurse stopped Basil at them.

"Family?"

Basil looked at the doors.

"Yes," he said.

"Relationship?"

Clifford saw him think about it. He saw the whole of it go across Basil's face, every possible answer, and none of them sayable, at two in the morning, to a tired nurse with a clipboard.

"Brother," said Basil.

The nurse wrote it down. "Name?"

Basil gave the name Keith had given the police at Bailey's. The flat over the dry cleaner's in Lewisham. The nurse wrote that down too, and nodded, and said a doctor would be out soon, and went through the doors, and they swung shut behind her, and Basil stood looking at them with his car keys in his hand.

"Brother," he said, to nobody.

"It's the closest," said Clifford.

"It isn't," said Basil. "It isn't even close."

* * *

They sat in plastic chairs for two hours.

Clifford got coffee from a machine. Basil did not drink his. He sat with his elbows on his knees and the paper cup between his

hands and looked at the floor, the way, Clifford thought, a man looks at the floor of a dressing room after a defeat. Not upset. Going through it. Every phase of play. Where it had gone wrong.

Clifford told him about the Heavenly Moon. All of it. Tan and his father. The lady in the green dress. Lynda with a Y. The Singapore Sling, and the paper umbrella, and the long look Keith had given her before he drank. The handkerchief over the glass. The dead number. He told it the way Jono would have wanted it told, in order, with nothing added.

Basil listened without interrupting. When Clifford got to Lynda, he looked up.

"What did she look like?"

"About forty. English. Dark bob. Bracelets."

Basil nodded slowly. He did not say anything. He looked back down at his coffee.

"You were expecting somebody else," said Clifford.

"Yes," said Basil.

"Who?"

Basil turned the paper cup a quarter turn between his hands. Then he saw himself do it, and stopped.

"Somebody in a straw hat," he said.

* * *

The doctor came out at four. A registrar, a young woman with her hair tied back and the look of somebody who had been on since eight the previous morning. She sat down in the chair next to Basil, which Clifford liked her for. She did not stand over them.

"He's stable," she said. "He's comfortable. We've given him something for the pain and he's sleeping." She looked at her tablet.

"I'll be honest with you, Mr..." She checked the name. "I'll be honest. I'm not completely sure what we're looking at."

"Tell me," said Basil.

"The pain's classic. Right upper quadrant, under the ribs, radiating to the shoulder. Fever. Sweating. Vomiting in the ambulance. That's the textbook picture for an inflamed gall bladder. Cholecystitis. It's common, it's painful, it's very treatable. The scan shows the gall bladder's thickened and angry, which fits." She scrolled. "But his bloods are strange."

"Strange how?"

"Some of his liver numbers are up, which could be the gall bladder. Could also be something he's taken. Something he's eaten or drunk." She glanced at Clifford. "Your friend said a cocktail."

"Half of one."

"Half of one wouldn't do this. Unless there was something in it that shouldn't have been." She shrugged, very slightly. "We've sent a toxicology panel. It'll be a day or two. It'll probably come back clean. They usually do, because most things that make people ill in bars aren't on the panel." She paused. "But that's not what's strange."

Basil waited.

"It's his cells," said the registrar. She frowned at the tablet as if it had said something rude. "Some of his markers. Inflammation, repair, the way his blood's clotting, a couple of other things. They're..." She stopped, and started again. "If you'd given me these numbers on a piece of paper without a name on them, I'd have said they belonged to a man of ninety. A healthy one. Very healthy, for ninety. But ninety." She looked up. "Your brother's how old?"

"Thirty," said Basil.

"Has he been ill? Anything chronic? Any history?"

"He doesn't have a history," said Basil, and then, seeing her face, "He's been abroad. A long time. I don't know what he's had."

The registrar looked at him a moment longer. Then she nodded, the way doctors nod when they have decided something is not their problem at four in the morning, and stood up.

"We'll keep him in. Antibiotics, fluids, pain relief. If it's the gall bladder, it'll settle in a few days and we'll talk about taking it out. If it's something else," she said, "we'll find out." She looked at Basil. "You can sit with him. Just one of you."

* * *

Basil went in.

Clifford stayed in the corridor with the admission form the nurse had given him to fill in, because somebody had to, on a clipboard with a pen on a string. Name: the Lewisham name. Address: the dry cleaner's. Next of kin: he thought about it, and wrote *Basil*, and Basil's mobile. Allergies: he did not know. Medical history: he did not know that either.

Presenting complaint, said the form. And a box.

Clifford sat with the pen over the box for a long time.

He thought about a woman with bracelets who had asked once for a photograph and never asked again. A glass with a handkerchief over it on a table on the twenty-fourth floor. A number that did not exist. And a registrar frowning at a tablet and saying *ninety*.

He did not know which it was. He knew he would never know. He knew, sitting there with the pen on its string, that this was going to be one of those things in this family that nobody ever settled, that sat in a pocketbook for thirty years with a question mark after it, and that somebody's great-grandson would read it one day at a kitchen table and not know either.

He wrote, in the box, in his big square American capitals:

GALL BLADDER?

And then, because he was not a Hills, and had never been told he wasn't allowed, he underlined it. Twice.

He took a photo of the form with his phone, and sent it to Jono in Preston, and to Chris, and put the phone face down on the plastic chair beside him.

Then he rang Tan.

Tan answered at once, at half past four in the morning, as if he had been sitting by the phone. Clifford told him. Tan listened without a word.

"I sent the glass to a laboratory at midnight," said Tan, when he had finished. "A good one. Mine. They will have an answer on Monday." He paused. "It will not be a useful answer. Laboratories do not give useful answers to questions like this. But I wanted it on the record that I asked."

* * *

The room was small and dim and cool, a curtain round the bed and a window with the blind down and a machine on a stand that made a small regular sound, like somebody tapping a pencil on a desk.

Keith was asleep. A drip in the back of his hand. A plastic clip on his finger with a red light in it. His face on the white pillow was grey and young and very tired, and his hair was stuck to his forehead, and he looked, Basil thought, about nineteen.

Basil pulled the plastic chair up to the bed and sat down.

He had sat beside a hospital bed once before. His mother's. In Kandang Kerbau, in 1995, though he had not been sitting then; he had been in a cot at the end of it, an hour old, red and furious. His father had told him about it. *She looked at me holding you for a long time. And then she said, he looks like you.*

He looked at the face on the pillow.

He did. He did look like him. Or the other way round. Basil had seen it at Ai Li's office the first morning, across the long table, and not let himself see it properly. He let himself now. In the dim room, with nobody watching. The line of the jaw. The eyebrows. The shape of the ear, which nobody ever notices and which is the one thing a face cannot lie about. His own face, in a different light. His father's face, thirty-six years younger. Sitting by the bed of a man younger than himself, who was his father, who was ninety-five, who had come down the line to sit at a table in Joo Chiat and tell him he could not tell him anything.

Basil put his hand on the edge of the bed. Not on Keith's hand. Near it.

He sat like that until it got light.

* * *

On the other side of the city, in a hotel room on the fortieth floor with the curtains open and the lights of the Strait below, Karina Petrick sat on the edge of a bed she had not slept in, fully dressed, with her phone in her hand.

She had been sitting like that since midnight.

She had seen the face in the car park in Bedok a week ago. She had put the phone face down on the seat. She had not rung. She had written *Saw C.* in a notebook and crossed it out, and every night since she had taken the phone out and looked at the number and put it away again. And every night she had told herself: tomorrow. And every morning she had told herself: it is not yet the date. There is time.

At ten past four in the morning she rang it.

It rang three times. Then a click, and a noise she knew, the big soft echo of a departure lounge, an announcement in Mandarin and then English, a flight to Doha.

"Yes?" said Lynda.

"Stop," said Karina. "Whatever you were going to do. Do not do it. I am cancelling. You will be paid."

There was a pause on the line. The echo of the departure lounge. Somebody laughing, a long way off.

"Stop what?" said Lynda. Her voice was pleasant and quick and perfectly level. "I bought a man a drink."

"Lynda."

"You said by morning," said Lynda. "It's morning."

And the line went dead.

Karina sat on the edge of the bed with the phone against her ear and the dead tone in it, the way a man had stood in a dark office five hours before with the same tone in his.

She did not know what it meant. *I bought a man a drink.* She did not know if it meant *I did it* or *I did nothing* or *I did what you paid for and I will not tell you which*. She had hired Lynda because Lynda never told anybody anything, and now that was the only thing in the world she wanted to know.

She put the phone down on the bed.

Outside, over the Strait, the sky was beginning to go grey. The ships were putting their lights out, one by one.

She did not cry. She had not cried since a platform in Paris in 1988, when she had not gone to watch a train go out. She sat very still on the edge of the bed with her hands in her lap, in the grey light, the way a woman sits in a stand when she does not want to be seen.

Then she took out the twenty-second notebook, and wrote the date, and the time, and *rang L.*, and *too late?*, and looked at the question mark for a long time, and left it.

* * *

Keith woke at half past seven.

Basil saw him come up out of it slowly, the way you come up out of deep water. His eyes opened. They went to the ceiling. Then the drip. Then the window, the blind, the grey light round its edges. Then Basil.

He looked at Basil for a long time without saying anything. As if he were checking him against something.

"You're here," he said.

"Yes."

"How long?"

"All night."

Keith closed his eyes. Opened them.

"I'm sorry," he said.

"Don't be."

Keith was quiet. Then his hand moved on the sheet, the one without the drip, and found the edge of the bed, and Basil's hand there, and stopped beside it. Not holding it. Beside it. The way Basil's had been all night.

"I was checking," said Keith. "In the night. When I woke up. The list." His voice was very tired. "There's something gone."

Basil waited.

"Which foot," said Keith. "I can't remember which foot." He looked at Basil, and his old eyes in the grey young face were frightened, for the first time since Basil had met him. "Yours. Rahim

said God taught it. I had it on the list. I had it on purpose. And I can't remember which one."

Basil looked at him.

Then he leaned forward, and put his own hand over Keith's on the sheet, and held it. Properly. The way you hold the hand of a man who is very old.

"Left," he said. "It's my left."

Keith shut his eyes.

"Left," he said. "Yes. Left."

And after a while he was asleep again, with his hand under Basil's, and the machine on its stand making its small regular sound, and the light coming up grey round the edges of the blind.

Basil did not take his hand away.

Chapter 12 – *The Monastery Roof*

> *Fri. 1 Sept. 2028. The old monastery, Paignton, north side, 11.55 p.m. Clear. No wind. Half moon. Going up. Fred on the rope. C.H. on the torch. If anybody reads this and I am not here to explain it, I was not drunk.*

The old monastery stood on the hill above Paignton the way it had stood for a hundred and forty years, with its back to the town and its face to the bay, and nobody in Paignton under fifty had ever been inside it.

Jono had. Once. In 1985, aged twelve, through a broken window at the back, on a dare, with two boys from Preston who had run away the moment the floorboards creaked and left him standing alone in the dark of a long stone corridor with his torch, listening to the building breathe. He had not been frightened. He had been interested. He had walked the whole length of the corridor and back, and found a door at the end with a staircase behind it going up, and stood at the bottom of the stairs for a long time, looking up into the dark, and not gone.

He had written it down that night, in the footballer book. *Monastery. Back window. Corridor. Stairs going up. Didn't go up.* And then, underneath, in the round careful hand of a twelve-year-old who had been told by his grandad that you did not write down feelings: *Next time.*

Forty-three years. It had taken him forty-three years to come back and go up.

* * *

It had been a monastery, then a school, then a home for something nobody quite remembered, then nothing. A long building

of grey limestone with pointed windows, three storeys, a slate roof with a steep pitch and a little bell tower at the west end with no bell in it. The windows on the ground floor were boarded. The gardens had gone to brambles and buddleia and a single great cedar that had been planted, the plaque said, by a bishop in 1889. A developer had bought it in 2011 and gone bust in 2013, and another had bought it in 2016 and gone quiet, and the planning notice on the gate had faded until you could only read the word *RESIDENTIAL* and part of a date.

It was the highest old building in the bay. That was why.

"Line of sight," Clifford had said, in the cellar, with the map on the centre screen and a circle drawn on it in red. "Torquay to Brixham. Every house. Every street. Hope's Nose to Berry Head. From the top of that tower, there's nothing in the way." He had tapped the screen. "The stone's in the cellar. The stone stays in the cellar. But the stone's got a reach of about two hundred yards, the way it's sitting. We need it to reach the whole bay. So we put a relay up high, and it talks to the stone, and the stone talks through it."

"Talks how?"

"Buddy, if I knew that, I'd be in Stockholm collecting a prize."

The relay was on the long table in the cellar. It did not look like much. A grey box the size of a shoebox, sealed, with a stubby black aerial on top and a small solar panel folded flat on one side, and a cable coiled up beside it that ended in a plug Jono had never seen before. Clifford had built it in nine days from a list of numbers on a black drive that Ai Li had sent over from Singapore. He had built it, he said, without understanding about a third of what he was doing, the way you follow a recipe in a language you only half read.

Keith had understood. Keith had come back from Singapore on the Monday, grey and thin, with a scar under his right ribs where they had taken the gall bladder out on the Wednesday, and he had sat in the cellar with his hand on the stone in its foam cradle, and

read Clifford's wiring diagram once, and pointed at two places on it, and said *these are the wrong way round*, and they had been.

He was in the cellar now. With his hand on the stone. Waiting.

* * *

Fred had made the bracket.

He had made it at the forge on Wednesday night, after the apprentices had gone, from a drawing Clifford had given him on the back of an envelope. Two arms of flat black iron, hand-forged, with holes punched through for the bolts and a curved clamp at the end that would go round the stone finial at the top of the bell tower. He had made it in three hours, and it was the best thing he had ever made, and he knew it, and he carried it up the hill on Friday night in a canvas bag over his shoulder as if it were a baby.

Biscuit had not come. Biscuit still did not go out after dark. Fred had left him at the forge, asleep under the workbench by the banked fire, with Ken sitting beside him with a mug of tea and a crossword, who had looked at the three of them going out of the door with a rope and a ladder and a canvas bag at half past eleven at night and said, "I don't want to know," and gone back to his crossword.

They went in over the back wall, the way Jono had gone in at twelve. The broken window had been boarded and the boards had been prised off and nailed back on by somebody and prised off again. Fred went through first, then the ladder, then Jono. Chris came last, slowly, with his bad hand held against his chest, and Jono reached back through the window and took his good arm and pulled, and Chris came through and stood in the dark of the long stone corridor with his torch, getting his breath.

"I've been in here before," said Chris.

"When?"

"1974. With Johnny Hills. The week before he died." Chris shone the torch along the corridor. The light went a long way and found nothing. "He brought me up here and stood just about where you're standing and said, *One day somebody's going to have to go up those stairs, and it won't be me.*" He lowered the torch. "I thought he meant him. Being old. I was twelve. I didn't think he meant anybody in particular."

Jono looked at him in the dark.

"I was ten months old in 1974," he said.

"I know," said Chris. "He'd been holding you at the christening the month before. In a knitted hat."

* * *

The stairs were where Jono had left them in 1985. At the end of the corridor, behind a door that was off its hinges now, going up into the dark. Stone steps, worn in the middle, a rope rail on iron hooks along the wall that had rotted and fallen and lay coiled on the treads like something asleep.

They went up. Three flights. Then a narrower one, wooden, steep as a ladder, up into the bell tower, and a trapdoor at the top that Fred put his shoulder to, and it lifted with a groan, and there was the sky.

The tower had a little flat platform at the top, lead, the size of a kitchen table, with a low stone parapet round it and the finial in the middle, a stone cross with its arms broken off a long time ago. And all round it, below, the whole of the bay.

Jono stood up on the platform and looked, and forgot for a moment what he had come for.

He had lived his whole life in Torbay and he had never seen it from here. The half moon was up over the sea to the east, laying a white road across the water. Below him Paignton, the streets and the

roofs and the lights, the pier going out into the black water with its lamps, the long dark line of the sands, Preston, the cliffs at Hollicombe. To the left, Torquay, the harbour lit, the big hotels on the hill with their windows gold, the clock tower on the Strand. Hope's Nose going out grey into the moonlight. And to the right, the other way, all the way along the curve of the bay, Goodrington and Broadsands and Churston and the dark shape of Brixham with its lights stacked up the hill round the harbour, and beyond it, at the very end, going out into the sea, long and flat like the bow of a ship, Berry Head.

The lighthouse was turning. He could see it from here. A tiny white arm going round, out at the end of everything, very small.

Line of sight, Clifford had said. *Nothing in the way.*

* * *

"Jono," said Chris, from the trapdoor. He had not come up onto the platform. He was standing on the ladder with his head and shoulders out, holding the torch, looking at the bay the way Jono was looking at it. "Get on with it. Before I fall off this thing and you have to write that down."

So Jono got on with it.

He tied the rope round his waist, the way Fred had shown him in the forge with a length of washing line, a bowline, and Fred took the other end and braced his feet against the base of the parapet and wrapped the rope twice round his forearm. Then Jono climbed up onto the parapet.

It was not high. It was four feet above the platform. But the platform was ninety feet above the ground, and the parapet was eighteen inches wide, and the finial was on the far side of it, at the very corner, where the stone met the sky. He had to stand on the parapet and reach out to it, over nothing, with the bracket in one

hand and the bay going away below him in every direction like a map.

He did not look down. He looked at the finial. The broken cross. Somebody had carved it in 1888 and put it up there, and it had stood through every gale for a hundred and forty years, and he thought: *If you stood up through all that, you can hold a shoebox.*

He put the clamp round it. He fed the first bolt through the hole that Fred had punched, and threaded the nut on, and turned it with his fingers until it bit, and then with the spanner from his pocket, one turn, two, three. Then the second. Then the third. The bracket stood out from the finial, black and solid, a little shelf of hand-forged iron against the sky.

"Box," he said.

Fred passed it up. One-handed, the other hand still braced on the rope. Jono took it and set it on the shelf and strapped it with the two steel straps Clifford had given him, and pulled them tight until the box did not move when he pushed it.

Then he unfolded the solar panel, and pointed it south, at where the sun would come up over the sea.

Then he took the plug at the end of the cable, the strange plug, and turned the box round until he found the socket, and pushed it in.

Nothing happened.

He had not known what he thought would happen. Lights, maybe. A hum. A spark. Nothing. A grey box on a black bracket on a broken cross, with a stubby aerial, sitting very still in the moonlight.

* * *

He got down off the parapet. His legs were shaking, now that he was down. He sat on the lead of the platform with his back against the stone and Fred untied the bowline for him because his

fingers would not do it, and Chris came the rest of the way up through the trapdoor and sat down beside him, with his bad hand in his lap, breathing hard.

Jono took his phone out. One bar. He rang the cellar.

Clifford answered. "Talk to me."

"It's up. It's on. It's plugged in."

"OK. OK. Hold on." Keys clicking. A long pause. Clifford's breathing. Then, quietly, not to Jono: "Keith?"

And then, down the line, in the cellar under Studio Ania, three miles away, Jono heard Keith's voice. Not loud. A long way from the phone. Tired, the way it had been since Singapore. But very clear.

"There," said Keith.

That was all. One word.

And Jono felt it.

He would try for a long time afterwards to say what he had felt, and get no further than he had got in the boat in Liverpool Bay. It was not a sound. It was not a light. It was the opposite of the thing in the boat. There, when Keith had put his hand on the stone, something under everything had switched off, a hum, a pressure, and left a silence. Here, on the roof, with the bay laid out below him in the moonlight, something under everything switched *on*. Very low. Very quiet. Like a fridge starting up in another room. Like the sea, when you have been away from it, and come back, and hear it again and realise it was always there.

It went out from the top of the tower. He felt it go. Not in his ears. In his teeth, almost. In the bones behind his eyes. Out over Paignton and the pier and the sands. Out along the curve of the bay to Brixham. Out the other way to Torquay and the harbour and

Hope's Nose. Out across the water to Berry Head, to the lighthouse going round at the very end of everything.

And then it was everywhere, and he could not feel it any more, because it was simply there, the way air is there.

Beside him, Chris had shut his eyes.

Fred was standing very still at the parapet with the rope still wrapped round his forearm, looking out over the town.

"Did you feel that?" said Fred.

"Yes," said Jono.

"What was it?"

Jono looked at the grey box on its iron shelf against the sky.

"I don't know," he said. He took out his pocketbook. "I'll write it down."

* * *

They came down at half past one. The stairs, the corridor, the window, the brambles, the wall. Nobody saw them. A police car went past the bottom of the hill on the main road as they came out of the gate, slowly, not stopping, and Jono stood very still in the shadow of the cedar until it had gone, the way he had stood in the shadow of things a thousand times on the other side of it. Inside it, for a second, under a street lamp, he saw the driver: a young constable, a boy, nineteen or twenty, alone, looking out at the dark with that face they all have at that age on nights, half bored and half hoping something will happen.

Jono watched him go and thought: *Something has, son. You just missed it.*

He walked Chris home. Then he walked home himself, through the empty streets, past the forge, where the light was still on and Ken was asleep in his chair with the crossword on his chest and

Biscuit across his feet, and up the hill to Preston, and let himself in, and did not go to bed.

He sat at his kitchen table with the pocketbook open and wrote it all down, every bit of it, from the back wall to the plug. He wrote down what Chris had said about Johnny Hills and the stairs. He wrote down *There*. He wrote down what he had felt and then crossed it out, because his grandad had said you did not write down feelings, and then wrote it again underneath, smaller, because his grandad had never been on the roof of the monastery at midnight with a stone talking to the bay through a shoebox.

At six the sky went grey. At half past he had a shower and put on his tunic and his lanyard, because it was Saturday, and Saturday was Mrs Hellier at seven, and Mrs Hellier did not care if you had been up all night on a roof.

* * *

He let himself in with the key safe at five to seven. The bungalow was warm and dim and smelled of lavender talc and toast. Mrs Hellier was awake, as she always was, sitting up in bed in her pink bedjacket with her glasses on and the radio on low, waiting for him. Ninety-five, the same age as Keith. He had thought about that, once or twice, lately.

"Morning, Mrs H."

"Morning, dear." She looked at him over her glasses as he came in. And stopped.

She looked at him for a long time. Not at his face. Above it. At the air, a few inches over the top of his head, where there was nothing.

"Jono," she said. "What's that?"

"What's what, my love?"

"That." She lifted one thin hand off the counterpane and pointed, quite steadily, at the air above his head. "There's a light. Over you. Like a little lamp. Like the ones on a switchboard. I was on the switchboard at the Imperial in 1951, I'd know one anywhere." She narrowed her eyes. "It's quite bright. Brighter than the girl who came on Thursday."

Jono stood very still in the doorway of the bedroom with his bag on his shoulder.

He did not look up. You cannot see above your own head. He knew that. He looked instead at the dressing table, at the old mirror on its stand, with its silvering going at the edges, and the bedroom in it, and Mrs Hellier in her pink bedjacket in it, and himself in the doorway behind.

And above Mrs Hellier's white head, in the mirror, very faint, so faint he would have missed it if he had not been told, there was a light.

A small steady glow. Amber. Like a lamp on a switchboard, lit, waiting for somebody to answer it.

Brighter than his.

"Well," said Mrs Hellier comfortably, and settled back against her pillows. "Don't just stand there, dear. I want my teeth."

Chapter 13 – *Grades*

Thurs. 7 Sept. 2028. Torquay, Town Hall, council chamber, planning committee, 6.40 p.m. Public gallery full. Gallery laughing. Chairman's lamp the dimmest in the room. He doesn't know why they're laughing. Everybody else does.

The children saw it first.

That was what everybody agreed on, afterwards, when there was an afterwards, and people from London and America came down on the train with instruments and clipboards and asked questions. It was the children. It was always going to be the children. Children look up.

Saturday the second of September was hot, the last proper hot day of the summer, and Goodrington sands were packed by ten. Families on towels, windbreaks, cool boxes, the ice-cream van on the prom with a queue to the steps. And at twenty past ten a girl of six from Bristol, standing at the edge of the water with a bucket, looked up at the lifeguard on his tall white chair and said, very loudly, in the voice six-year-olds use for things that have just occurred to them, "Mummy, why has that man got a light on his head?"

Her mother looked. She did not see anything. She said, *don't be silly*.

And then the boy on the next towel said, "He has, though." And his sister said, "That lady's got one too." And a toddler in a sun hat pointed at his grandad and laughed and laughed, and his grandad looked up, at the air above his own head, which nobody can see, and then at the toddler's, and stopped laughing, and sat down very suddenly on the cool box.

By eleven it was all along the beach. By twelve it was on the internet. By one o'clock there were four hundred videos of nothing, of the air above people's heads, with children's voices behind them saying *there, there, can't you see it*, and a lot of adults saying *no*, and then, one after another, as the afternoon went on and the sun moved round over the bay, the adults saying *oh*.

* * *

It was not the same for everybody. That was the first thing anybody worked out.

The children saw it straight away, Saturday morning, all of them, as if they had always been able to and somebody had just turned the lights up. Old people saw it next. Mrs Hellier at seven on Saturday. Maureen at nine, at the forge, looking at Ken over a cup of tea and saying, *Ken, love, have you done something with your hair?* The Lightwave men, all of them, by lunchtime. Anybody over about seventy-five, the vicar of St John's said in his sermon on Sunday, as if the Lord had decided they had waited long enough.

Everybody in between took longer. A day. Two days. It depended, the scientists said later, on something they could not measure and did not have a name for. Some people saw it by Saturday night. Some people did not see it until Tuesday, and then saw it all at once, at a bus stop or a checkout, and had to sit down.

And nobody outside the bay saw it at all.

That was the second thing. Jono worked it out on Sunday afternoon, at Paignton station, watching the up train come in from Kingswear. A family got off, holidaymakers, suitcases, a pushchair. Above the heads of every person on that platform who lived in Torbay, there was a faint lamp, steady, amber. Above the heads of the family off the train, nothing. Clear air.

He watched them walk out into Station Square. He watched them stop at the zebra crossing outside Bailey's and look at the

people around them, at the lamps, and see nothing, and look puzzled at why everybody else was looking at the air.

He watched them for three hours, on and off, from the window of the public bar. At ten past six, sitting outside Bailey's with ice creams, the father suddenly stopped with the cone halfway to his mouth and stared at a man walking past with a dog. Then at his wife. Then, very slowly, at his own reflection in the window of the bar.

Six hours, near enough. Jono wrote it down. *Visitors: about six hours in the bay before they see it. Leaving: don't know yet.*

Clifford, on the phone from the cellar, when Jono told him, was quiet for a long time.

"That's the coverage," he said at last. "That's the circle. Hope's Nose to Berry Head. It takes about six hours in the field before it, I don't know. Takes."

"And when they leave?"

"I don't know, buddy," said Clifford. "I really don't. Ask Keith."

Jono asked Keith. Keith was in the cellar with his hand on the stone. He looked up at Jono for a long time, with those old eyes, and did not answer.

* * *

What they were, nobody could agree.

They were lamps. Everybody agreed on that much. Small and round and steady, a few inches above the crown of the head, not quite there, the way the stars are not quite there when you look straight at them. You saw them best out of the corner of your eye. They did not move when the head moved, quite; they lagged a little, like a balloon on a string. They were amber, mostly. Some were more yellow. A few, very few, were almost white.

And they were not all the same.

That was the third thing, and the one that mattered. By Monday morning everybody in Torbay knew it. Some lamps were bright and some were dim. Some were so faint you could only see them in shadow. And on Monday morning, in staffrooms and offices and on building sites and in the queue at the post office, the whole of Torbay began, very quietly, to compare.

It's clever, the children said. They said it at once, without being told, in the playgrounds on Monday morning, the way children know things. *It's how clever you are.* And the adults said *don't be ridiculous*, and then looked round the staffroom, or the office, or the site hut, at who was bright and who was dim, and stopped saying it.

Because it was not how clever you were. Not exactly. Not the way school meant clever. Jono saw that by Tuesday. Mrs Hellier's lamp was nearly white, and she had left school at fourteen to go on the switchboard. The new manager at the job centre on Hyde Road, who had a degree and a lanyard and a laptop, had a lamp you could barely see. The lad who drove the bin lorry on Jono's road, who could reverse it down the hill into the cul-de-sac in one go without touching a single parked car, had a lamp like a headlight.

It was not clever. It was something next door to clever. It was whether you could do the thing. Whether you saw the whole of it, and knew where it was going, and could make it get there. Whether, Jono thought, standing in the job centre on Tuesday morning with Mrs Hellier's prescription in his hand and watching the manager with the dim lamp explain to a queue of people with bright ones why the system would not let him do anything, you could finish things.

Competence, Tan had said, two years ago, in a video call from forty-two floors above the port. *That is my only condition. That the people who run this place can do what they say they will do.*

Jono stood in the job centre and thought: *Well, Mr Tan. Now everybody can see it.*

* * *

Fred saw his own on the Tuesday night.

He had been avoiding it. He did not tell anybody that. All weekend, all Monday, at the forge, with Ken and Alf and the apprentices all looking at each other's heads and laughing, and Maureen going round with her glasses on telling everybody whose was brightest, Fred had kept his back to the windows and his eyes on the fire. He did not want to see. He knew what he would see. Twelve years of zero-hours. Twelve years of waiting for a text. A dad who died of drink in the members' bar of the Albion at fifty-four. A boy who had left school at sixteen with nothing, because nobody had ever told him there was anything to leave with.

He knew what his lamp would be. He did not need a window to tell him.

On Tuesday night, at ten, after the others had gone, he banked the fire and turned off the lights and went to the side door with Biscuit's lead in his hand out of habit, though Biscuit would not come. And the big window by the door, with the dark square outside it, showed him himself.

He stopped.

He stood in front of the window with the lead in his hand and looked. At the young man in the leather apron, with black to the elbows and a burn on his forearm and his hair sticking up. And above that young man's head, in the dark glass, a lamp.

Bright. Steady. Nearly as bright as Ken's. Brighter than Alf's.

Fred stood there for a long time.

Then he went and sat down on the anvil, which you were not supposed to do, and put his face in his black hands, and Biscuit

came out from under the workbench and put his chin on Fred's boot, and the two of them sat there in the dark forge with the banked fire ticking, until Fred could stand up again.

He did not tell anybody that either.

* * *

Thursday was the planning committee.

It was in the council chamber at the Town Hall on Castle Circus in Torquay, the big Edwardian pile with the clock tower and the marble stairs and the painted ceiling, where the council had met for a hundred years and done, Richard said, very little. Five items on the agenda. The fourth was a scheme for the old bus depot site on the Totnes road, which Vicky had put in for Tan in June, and which the officers had recommended for refusal on grounds that ran to forty-one pages and that Richard said he had read twice and could not find a single reason in.

The public gallery was full. It was never full. On an ordinary Thursday there would be six people in it, and four of them would be asleep. This Thursday it was full by six o'clock and people were standing at the back and down the stairs and out into the hall. Nobody had organised it. Nobody had put it on the internet. They had simply come, the way people come to look at a fire.

Jono stood at the back. Richard was in the front row with his box file. Vicky was beside him.

At half past six the committee came in.

Nine councillors and three officers. They came in through the door behind the long table, in a line, in their suits, with their papers and their water glasses, and sat down. And the public gallery looked at them.

And above the heads of the committee, in the soft light of the chandeliers under the painted ceiling, the lamps.

Two were bright. A woman from Brixham who had been a nurse, and a young man from Preston who had been elected in May and did not know yet how things were done. One was middling. And six of them, including the chairman, a large comfortable man in a blue suit who had chaired the planning committee for eleven years and been photographed in 2026 having lunch at the Imperial with a woman from Jersey, were dim. So dim that from the back of the gallery you had to look away and catch them sideways to see them at all. Like the last bar on a phone in a basement.

The three officers were the dimmest of all.

Nobody in the gallery said anything. There was a sort of sigh. A long, low sound, three hundred people breathing out together.

The chairman picked up his papers and said, in his comfortable voice, "Good evening, everybody. What a lot of you. Item one."

And somebody at the back of the gallery laughed.

Not loudly. A short, surprised snort, a woman's, quickly stifled. Then a man near the front. Then two teenagers on the stairs. And then, all at once, like the barriers lifting at the level crossing, the whole gallery, three hundred people, laughing. Not cruelly. Not even very loudly. The way you laugh when you have been told a thing for forty years and have just seen, with your own eyes, that it was never true.

The chairman looked up at them. He looked puzzled. He looked at the officer beside him, whose lamp was a faint smudge, and the officer looked back at him, equally puzzled. They could not see it. Not yet. Not about themselves, and not, it turned out, about anybody. Some people took longer.

"Is something funny?" said the chairman.

Nobody answered. The laughing went on, quieter, and stopped, and the gallery sat and looked at him, very politely, with three

hundred lamps over three hundred heads, all of them brighter than his.

Item four was approved, nine votes to none, at eight minutes past seven. Nobody on the committee could have said why. Jono wrote it down. *Approved. Nobody on the committee could have said why.*

* * *

It was not all laughing.

By the Friday there had been a fight in a pub in Torquay, two brothers, because the younger one's lamp was brighter and the older one could not stand it. A woman in Paignton had lost her job at a solicitor's because her lamp was brighter than the senior partner's and he had found a reason by lunchtime. A man in Brixham had stopped his teenage son going to school, because the son's lamp was so bright it frightened him, and he did not want people looking at the boy.

People had started wearing hats. Big ones. Not that it made any difference; the lamps sat on top of the hats the way they sat on top of heads. But people wore them anyway, the way you pull a curtain across a window that has no glass in it.

The *Herald* called it the Torbay Glow. The nationals called it mass hysteria, and sent reporters, who stood on Paignton seafront for six hours and then stopped calling it anything. A professor from Exeter came, and saw it by teatime, and went home and did not come back. Two Americans in a hire car with a box of equipment drove round the bay for three days and left without speaking to anybody, and Clifford, who had seen their car, said nothing about them at all.

And the dogs were still silent after dark, every one, from Hope's Nose to Berry Head.

* * *

Chris saw his own number on the Saturday.

He had not been looking either. He had been in the cellar, mostly, with Keith and Clifford, and the stone, and the grey box on the monastery roof talking to the bay. He had looked at other people's lamps. He had seen Karen's, on the quay on Sunday, before he knew what it was: a steady clear lamp, white almost, over her grey head as she leaned on the railings looking at the boats, and she had turned round and looked at the air over his head and gone very quiet and said, *Oh, Chris*, and not told him what she meant.

He had not looked at his own. He did not know why. He was sixty-six. He had had a stroke. He knew there were days when the words did not come, and he had to go round the outside of a sentence to find the way in. He was frightened, he supposed. Of how dim it would be.

On Saturday morning he walked up Torbay Road from the sea end, past the shops, the way he always did, past the café and the nail bar and the charity shop, and the charity shop had a new window, a big clean plate of glass with a display of old cameras in it, which was why he stopped.

And there he was. In the glass, behind the cameras. An old man in a coat, grey, a bit stooped on the left, with a bad hand held against his chest. And above him, a lamp.

Not dim. Not bright. A steady, ordinary, middling amber glow, exactly like a switchboard lamp on the fifth floor at Fleet House in 1978, lit, waiting for somebody to answer it.

And in it, the way people had begun to see them by the end of the week if they looked long enough, sideways, out of the corner of the eye, a number.

He looked at it for a long time.

He did not know what it meant. Nobody did. Some people said the numbers went up to thirty, and some said a hundred, and some

said they were not numbers at all but something your eye made of the light because it wanted them to be. He did not know if his was good or bad. He did not know if it was a grade, or an extension, or a fault code, or nothing.

It was eighteen.

Chris stood on Torbay Road in front of the charity-shop window with his bad hand against his chest and looked at the number eighteen glowing over his own reflected head. And something happened in his chest that he had not felt since April. Since before. Since a cellar and a young man on the bottom stair and a kettle.

He laughed.

Out loud. On his own. On Torbay Road on a Saturday morning, with people going past in big hats, looking at him. He laughed until he had to put his good hand on the glass to hold himself up, and a woman inside the charity shop came to the window and looked at him with alarm, and he waved at her, and could not stop.

Eighteen, he thought. *Of course it was. Of course it bloody was.*

He wiped his eyes with the back of his good hand.

Then he took out his phone, and stood on Torbay Road in front of the window, and sent a text to Karen. Not to Jono. Not to Keith. To Karen.

Saw mine. You'll never guess.

The answer came back in under a minute, as if she had been holding her phone.

Yes I will.

Chapter 14 – *The Black Team*

Fri. 15 Sept. 2028. Bailey's, back room, 7.30 p.m.
First test. V., A., R. Read every lamp in the room, numbers and all, every time, same as each other.
Except one. Ania at the window with her tea.
Nothing there. R. would not stop looking. Ania let her.

Rani Mistry had been asked a great many questions in her life by people deciding whether to give her a gun, and she had never once been asked the question Keith asked her.

"Are you good at waiting?"

It was the Monday, in the cellar under Studio Ania, at the long desk in front of the screens. Chris was there, in the chair with his bad hand in his lap. Clifford was there, tipped back, one foot on the desk. Keith sat across from her with a cup of tea he had not touched, and a stone in a foam cradle at his elbow that he kept one hand on, all the time, the way you keep a hand on a dog that might get up.

She had known Keith for four weeks. She had not been told who he was. She had not asked. She had been in the police for nine years and the last five of them on firearms, and the first thing firearms teaches you is that the people who tell you the least are usually the ones who know what they are doing.

"Yes," she said.

"How good?"

She thought about it. Honestly. That was another thing firearms teaches you. You do not say what sounds good. You say what is true, because one day somebody is going to bet their life on it.

"I once lay on a roof in Plymouth for eleven hours," she said, "in February, in the rain, watching a window. I didn't move. I didn't eat. I didn't take my eye off it. At the end of eleven hours the man came to the window and I was ready." She paused. "I didn't have to shoot. He saw the dot on his chest and put his hands up. But I was ready. After eleven hours. That's how good."

Keith looked at her for a long time.

It was not the way men usually looked at her. She was thirty-one, and small, and she had grown up behind the counter of her father's newsagent on Union Street in Torquay, and she knew every way a man could look at her across a counter. This was none of them. It was the way her grandmother had looked at her, once, when she was nine and had come home from school and announced that she was going to be a police officer. A long, sad, patient look. As if the old woman could see the whole of it, every year of it, laid out ahead of the child like a road, and where it went, and what was at the end.

"Yes," said Keith at last, very quietly. "You are."

And he looked down at his hand on the stone, and did not look at her again for the rest of the meeting.

* * *

There were three of them.

Vicky Ooi, who ran Tan's business in Torbay and had done since 2026, and had a lamp so bright that people at Bailey's walked into things. Annie Hall, who ran the front of house at Bailey's, who had been a croupier on a cruise ship and an events manager in Bristol and a great many other things, and who could tell you within ten seconds of a man walking through the door what he was going to order, how much he would tip, and whether he was going to cause trouble after eleven. And Rani.

Chris told them what it was. Not all of it. He said that the lamps were real, and that nobody in the world understood them, and that there was a way, with a small device, to see them more clearly. Much more clearly. Not just bright and dim. Everything. He said it would be done by a doctor, in Exeter, in a clinic, under a local anaesthetic, in twenty minutes. A thing the size of a grain of rice, under the skin, behind the left ear.

"Is it safe?" said Vicky.

"We think so," said Clifford.

"You think so."

"It's been done once before," said Clifford. "On one person." He did not look at Keith. Everybody else did.

"And what does it do?" said Annie. "Exactly?"

Chris was quiet for a moment.

"It lets you see who's competent," he said. "In a room. In a meeting. In the council chamber, on a planning committee. Not guess. See." He looked round at the three of them. "And who they answer to."

* * *

Rani had the implant on the Tuesday, at a private clinic in a Georgian terrace in Exeter, in a room with pale green walls and a window onto a garden. The doctor was a woman of about sixty with a Bristol accent who did not say her name and did not ask for Rani's. Twenty minutes. A sting, a pressure behind the ear like a thumb, a sort of click that she felt in her teeth more than heard. A dressing. A cup of tea.

"You might have headaches," the doctor said. "For a day or two. Lie down if you do. Don't fight it."

Rani did not have headaches. She had a long, slow, sideways feeling for the rest of the afternoon, driving back down the A380 with Annie in the passenger seat asleep, as if the world had been put very slightly out of true and then very carefully put back, and she was not sure it had been put back quite where it was.

That night she stood in front of the bathroom mirror in her flat on Union Street, above her father's shop, with the light off and only the street lamp coming in through the frosted glass, and looked at the air above her own head.

She had seen her lamp before. Everybody had, by then. A steady, bright, amber glow, sideways, out of the corner of her eye, with something in it that might have been a number if she had looked long enough.

She did not have to look long enough now.

It was there. Clear. As if somebody had wiped a window. A lamp, round and bright, sitting in the air above her reflected head. And in it, plain, unmistakable, a number. Twenty-six. And under the number, very small, like the writing on the back of an old photograph, other things. Lines. Marks. A sort of fine grain in the light, like the grain in wood, that she could not read yet and knew, somehow, that she would.

And from the bottom of the lamp, going down, behind her, out of the mirror and through the wall of the bathroom and away, very faint, a line.

A thin line of light. Like a cord. Like the cords on the old switchboards in the photographs at the museum in Torquay, that her father had taken her to see when she was small, when you plugged one socket into another to put a call through.

It went out of her lamp and through the wall and away to the south-west. Towards Paignton. She followed it in her head the way she would have followed a line of sight on a roof. Down the hill.

Across the town. To the cellar under Studio Ania. To a man sitting with his hand on a stone.

She stood in the dark bathroom for a long time.

And who they answer to.

* * *

The test was on the Friday, in the back room at Bailey's, because Ania's Rage were rehearsing there that evening and Chris said the more lamps in the room the better.

It was full. The band in the corner by the fireplace: the drummer from Brixham, the maths teacher in his cardigan, Chris on his stool with his guitar. Tan's people from the bar. Fred, from the forge, in a clean shirt, very self-conscious, standing by the door. Richard with his box file. Ken and Maureen, who had heard there was something on. Jono, at the back, with his pocketbook. Keith, at the long table, with his back to the wall.

And at the little table in the bay of the window, on her own, with a cup of tea held in both hands, Ania.

Rani had seen her before. Everybody in Torbay had. On the internet, on the stage at Bailey's on the night of the gun, in the Cavern Club videos. A young woman in a grey costume, very straight, dark hair up, who sang the way somebody lays a table. Rani had never been in a room with her. She had not expected to feel anything about it. She felt as if she had walked into a church.

They stood in a row at the end of the long table, the three of them, Vicky and Annie and Rani, the way Clifford had told them to, with their backs to the fireplace, and looked at the room.

"Go," said Clifford. "Everybody. One at a time. Write it down. Don't confer."

* * *

It was easy. That was the frightening thing. It was the easiest thing she had ever done.

She looked at Chris on his stool and there was his lamp, middling, steady, and in it eighteen, and under it the grain, and the grain said things she could not have put into words but understood the way you understand a face: tired, and stubborn, and sad, and very slow to give up. And going out of the bottom of it, down, a cord. Not to the cellar. Somewhere else. South, towards Brixham, towards the sea. Very bright. Very short. As if what it was plugged into was not far away at all.

She looked at Fred by the door. Twenty-four. Bright, young, raw, the grain all over the place like a wood that has not been seasoned yet. A cord going out of it to Ken, beside him, as short as a hand.

She looked at Ken. Twenty-nine. Old and steady and clear, and his cord went out of the window and up the hill and stopped, somewhere, she thought, in a churchyard.

Richard: twenty-seven. Maureen: twenty-two, and fierce. Tan's barman from the public bar, a boy of twenty from Paignton: nineteen, with a cord that went all the way to Singapore.

She wrote them down. She did not look at what Vicky and Annie were writing. She did not need to. When Clifford took the three papers at the end and laid them side by side on the long table, with the room watching, they were the same. Every name. Every number. Nineteen people in the room, and three women who had never compared a single note, and not one figure different.

Clifford looked at the papers for a long time.

"OK," he said, very quietly. "OK. That's not a guess."

Jono, at the back, was writing.

* * *

She had left one out. They all had. They had each, separately, without conferring, done the same thing. They had written eighteen names and left a gap.

Keith.

Rani had looked at him first. Before Chris, before anybody. She had not been able to help it. And above his head there had been not one lamp but two. One in front of the other, the way you see two lamps on a road at night when one car is following another, the nearer one bright and the further one behind it, dimmer, much older, much further away. The near one said thirty, or thereabouts, and the grain in it was new and clean and strange, like a house nobody had lived in. The far one she could not read the number of at all. It was too far back. The grain of it was so fine and so dense that looking at it was like looking down a well.

And the cord. One cord, coming out of both lamps at once, going down, into the stone under his hand.

She had not written anything for him. Neither had the others. Clifford, seeing the gap, had looked up at Keith, and Keith had looked back, and shaken his head, very slightly, and Clifford had said nothing.

* * *

And then there was Ania.

Rani had left her till last. She did not know why. She had felt her there all through the test, at the edge of things, at the little table in the window with her tea, the way you feel the sea behind you when you have your back to it on a beach.

When everybody else was done, she turned round and looked.

Ania was sitting very straight at the little table in the bay, with her cup in both hands and her thumbs hooked over the rim, looking

out of the window at Station Square, at the forge across the way with its doors open and its light coming out onto the stones.

There was no lamp.

Not a dim one. Not a faint one. Nothing. Rani looked at the air above Ania's head with every bit of the thing behind her ear, sideways, straight on, out of the corner of her eye, and there was clear air. The window behind. The square. The forge. And nothing between.

It was not like the visitors off the train, who had no lamps because they had not been in the bay long enough. Those were empty air. This was not empty. This was a gap. A place where something should have been and had been taken away, very neatly, so that you could see the shape of where it went. Like the place on a switchboard where a socket has been, and has been unscrewed, and the brass plate left behind with four holes in it and nothing behind the holes but dark.

There was no number. There was no grain. There was no cord.

There was nothing plugged into Ania at all.

* * *

Rani did not know how long she looked.

The room had gone quiet. She knew that, distantly. Clifford had stopped talking. Annie had turned round too, and Vicky, and both of them had looked, and looked away, quickly, the way you look away from somebody in a hospital bed who is worse than you expected. Chris on his stool had put his guitar down. Jono at the back had stopped writing.

Rani did not look away.

She stood at the end of the long table with her back to the fireplace and looked at the gap above Ania's head, and she could not stop. It was the eleven hours on the roof in Plymouth. It was the

window. It was the thing firearms teaches you, which is that when you see something you do not understand, you do not take your eye off it until you do.

She did not understand it.

And Ania let her.

That was what Rani would remember. Not the gap. Ania. She did not turn from the window. She did not look round, or frown, or say *what are you staring at*, or get up and leave. She sat very still at the little table with her tea in both hands, in profile, looking out at the forge, and let herself be looked at. For a long time. For as long as Rani needed. The way you let a child look at something it has to learn the shape of.

Then, at last, without turning her head, Ania said:

"There is nothing there, Rani."

Every word the same length.

"I know," said Rani. Her voice came out of her rough. "Why?"

Ania did not answer that. She drank a little of her tea, which Rani had been told she never did, and set the cup down on the saucer, square, and looked at it.

"You will see a great many things now," said Ania. "Most of them will be true. Some of them will be true, and you will wish they were not." She turned her head at last, and looked at Rani, straight, with her clear steady eyes. "And some of them will be true, and you will be the only one who can see them. That is the hardest. Nobody will be able to tell you whether you are right."

Rani stood very still.

"What do I do then?" she said.

Ania looked at her for a long time.

"You will know," she said. "You are very good at waiting."

* * *

Afterwards, in the public bar, with the band packing up and people going home and the lamps going out of the door into Station Square one by one like lanterns on a path, Rani found Keith by the window. The small table where he had sat on the night of the gun.

"You knew," she said. "On Monday. When you asked me if I was good at waiting. You knew something."

Keith looked up at her. The two lamps over his head, the near one and the far one, one behind the other.

"Yes," he said.

"Tell me."

"No."

"Why not?"

He was quiet for a long time. Then he turned the cup on the table in front of him, a quarter turn, by the handle.

"Because you'd do it differently," he said. "And I'd rather you did it the way you're going to."

She did not understand that. She would, later. On a wet day in October, in a square, with a crowd, and a chain of office, and a man's broad back in a dark coat. She would understand it exactly.

Now she only stood by the window, with the thing behind her ear humming very faintly, and looked across Station Square at the forge, where Fred was banking the fire for the night, his bright young lamp going to and fro in the glow.

And then, before she could stop herself, she looked back over her shoulder, through the door to the back room, at the little table in the bay. Ania had gone. The cup was on the saucer, still half full.

Above the empty chair, where Ania had been sitting, the gap was still there.

As if it had not been in her at all. As if it had been in the room, waiting, and she had only been sitting under it.

Chapter 15 – *Richard's List*

Sat. 23 Sept. 2028. Station Square, Paignton, 7.20 p.m. Richard on the kerb outside Bailey's, by the zebra, with the glasses in his lap. Sat there forty minutes. Nobody went near him. Fred brought him a mug of tea from the forge and put it down beside him on the kerb and went away again. He didn't drink it until he'd taken the glasses off. Then he drank all of it, cold.

Richard was asked for the names on a Saturday afternoon, at his own drawing board, by the man he trusted most in Torbay, and he gave them, and it was not until an hour later that he understood he had been tested, and by then he was too angry to sit down.

Chris came at three. He let himself in, the way he had for two years, with the key Richard had given him the week after the storm. Richard was at the board in the bay window with the Paignton sheets pinned up, the station and the square and Torbay Road and the sea front, in pencil, the fourth version, the one that was going to be built. He was seventy-eight. He had been up since five. He was always up at five. He did not turn round.

"Sit down," he said. "Kettle's hot. I'm doing the trees."

Chris did not sit down. He stood behind him, the way he did, and looked at the drawing for a long time. Then he said:

"Richard. I need you to write something down for me."

"What?"

"Names."

Richard's pencil stopped.

"The people who did it," said Chris. "To the bay. Forty years of it. The ones who decided. Not the ones who carried it out. The ones who decided, and let it be decided, and took the money for deciding." He paused. "You know who they are. You've known longer than any of us. You've sat across tables from them since 1985. I want you to write them down."

* * *

Richard put the pencil down on the ledge of the board, very carefully, the way he always did when he was about to say something he would not be able to take back.

"Why?"

"Because I need it," said Chris. "From you. In your hand."

"For what?"

Chris did not answer that. He took a sheet of cartridge paper from the pile by the board, Richard's good paper, the paper he did the final drawings on, and laid it on the table by the window, and put a pencil beside it. A 2B. Richard's own.

Richard looked at the paper for a long time.

He had been asked for names before. By journalists, twice, both of whom had gone away and never printed them. By a man from the Audit Commission in 2004, who had nodded and taken notes and retired the following year. By the Officer, once, in 2019, across a table in the planning department, very pleasantly, *off the record, Richard, between us, who do you think is really behind all this?*, and Richard had very nearly told him, and had not, and seven years later eight of his emails had been on a website.

He had never written them down. Not all of them. Not in one place. He had them in his head, the way he had the bay in his head: every street, every site, every plot that had gone to the wrong people

for the wrong price at the wrong time, and who had been in the room.

He sat down at the table by the window. He picked up the 2B.

He wrote for forty minutes.

* * *

He did it properly. He was an architect. He did not do anything any other way.

Name. Position. Years. What they decided. Not what he thought. What he knew. What he could have stood up in a room and said, with the paper in his hand.

The Leader, who had gone in 2026 when the projection showed his face eighteen feet high on the hoardings. Two Leaders before him. A Chief Executive in the nineties who had sold the harbour car parks to a company in Jersey for less than a terraced house and gone to live in Portugal. The chairman of the planning committee, eleven years, the big comfortable man in the blue suit whose lamp, three weeks ago, three hundred people had laughed at. Four councillors. Three officers, by name. A solicitor in Union Street whose firm had acted for every company in Jersey that had ever bought anything in the bay, and whose great-grandfather's firm had acted for a man called Petherick. A planning consultant in Exeter. A man at the county. A director of the company in Jersey, whose name Richard had found in 2016 at the bottom of a filing he was not supposed to have read.

Sixteen names.

He stopped. He put the pencil down.

Then he picked it up again and wrote one more, at the bottom, and looked at it.

The Officer.

He had never put that one down. Not even in his head. The Officer had leaked the emails, and then, in 2027, when it was all over, had sent Richard a note. Handwritten, unsigned, in a plain envelope. *I was told to. I should have refused. I am sorry.* Richard had it still, in the back of the SEAFRONT file. He had read it perhaps a hundred times. He had forgiven him. He thought he had.

He looked at the name at the bottom of the list for a long time.

Then he wrote, beside it, in brackets, very small: *(apologised)*.

And then he sat back, and turned round, and held out the paper to Chris.

* * *

Chris did not take it.

He took something out of the inside pocket of his coat instead. A brown envelope, A4, sealed, a bit creased, with a date on the front in his own hand. *22 March 2026*. Two and a half years ago. The month the clock started. Before the fire, before the film, before any of it.

He tore it open, and took out a single sheet, and laid it on the table beside Richard's.

Seventeen names.

The same seventeen. Not in the same order. Chris's were in date order, the way Chris did everything, with years beside them and, under each, a reference: a tape number, a frame, a date, *TSW 14/3/89*, *Spotlight 22/9/96*, *photo 41,227*. The Goldmine. His father's tapes. Sixty thousand photographs. Every name with its evidence, from the archive, filed.

And at the bottom, the Officer. And beside it, in brackets, in Chris's small careful hand: *(?)*.

Richard looked at the two sheets side by side for a long time.

Then he stood up.

* * *

"You had it," he said.

"Yes."

"You had it all along. Since March 2026. In an envelope."

"Yes."

"Then why," said Richard, and his voice did a thing it had not done since the storm, "in God's name, did you make me sit here for forty minutes and write it out?"

Chris did not look away.

"Because I needed to know you would," he said.

"You *knew* I would. You've known me two and a half years."

"I knew you'd write the sixteen. I didn't know about the last one." Chris looked at the bottom of Richard's sheet. "I didn't know if you'd put him on. After the note. I didn't know if you'd let yourself."

"And if I hadn't?"

"Then you'd have been a kinder man than I am," said Chris. "And I'd have had to think again about what I'm going to ask you to do next."

Richard stood by the window with his hands shaking.

He was angry. He had not been this angry since the morning of the emails, when he had sat in this room and looked at eight sentences on a screen and understood that somebody he had shaken hands with had gone through eight years of his life with a pair of tweezers. He was angry the way you are angry with a friend, which is worse than any other way, because it has nowhere to go.

"Who else knows about this?" he said.

"Vicky," said Chris. "Annie. Rani."

"They weren't here."

"No," said Chris. "They were outside."

* * *

Richard looked out of the bay window.

There was a car parked across the road. A blue one. He had seen it when he sat down and thought nothing of it. Three women in it, not talking. Vicky in the driver's seat, with her hands on the wheel. A dark-haired woman in the back he knew from Bailey's, the front-of-house one, Annie. And beside her, a small woman with very still shoulders, whom he did not know, looking straight at his window.

Straight at him. Or not at him. Above him.

He had heard about the implants. Everybody in Rage had heard. He had not believed it. He had been an architect for fifty-three years and he did not believe in things he could not draw.

"They've been watching me," he said.

"They've been watching your lamp," said Chris. "While you wrote. All forty minutes." He paused. "They can see things now, Richard. Not just bright and dim. They can see who a person answers to. There's a sort of line. A cord. It goes from your lamp to whoever's got hold of the other end of you."

Richard did not say anything.

"I had to know where yours went," said Chris. "Before I showed you. Because once you've seen what I'm going to show you, there's no taking it back, and if your cord went to the wrong place, they'd know everything you knew by Monday."

"And where does it go?"

Chris almost smiled.

"Into the ground," he said. "Rani says. Straight down. Out of your lamp and through the floor and into the ground under this house, and along under the road, and down the hill, and into the square. She followed it. She says it goes into the stones under Station Square and doesn't come out." He shook his head. "She said she'd never seen one do that. She said it was like a man who answers to a place."

Richard stood by the window for a long time.

Then, very slowly, he sat down again. Not at the table. In his old chair by the drawing board, the leather one, with the stuffing coming out of the arm.

"I'm still angry," he said.

"I know."

"I'm going to be angry for a week."

"I know," said Chris. "I'd be angry for a month."

Richard looked at his drawing board. At the fourth version. At the square.

"What are you going to show me?" he said.

* * *

They walked down to Station Square at half past six, the two of them, slowly, because Richard was seventy-eight and Chris was sixty-six with a stroke behind him, and neither of them was in a hurry. The blue car followed at a distance and parked by the station. Nobody got out.

It was a soft September evening, warm, the light going gold and long over the bay. The square was full of people. Saturday. Bailey's had its windows open and tables out on the pavement, and the public bar was loud. Across the way the forge had its doors open and the fire going, and Fred was showing two of the new

apprentices something on the anvil, and the hammer rang out across the stones. The barriers were up at the level crossing. The lamps were over every head, amber, steady, going to and fro across the square like lanterns.

Clifford was waiting by the zebra crossing with a small black case.

He opened it. Inside, in grey foam, there was a pair of glasses. Heavy black frames, thick, old-fashioned, the kind a man wore in 1965. The lenses were clear. On the left arm, behind the ear, a small bump, like a bead under the plastic.

"Don't ask me how they work," said Clifford. "Keith built the bit that matters. I built the frames. They talk to the box on the monastery roof, and the box talks to the stone, and the stone talks to..." He stopped. "Keith says they show you a page. One page. Something that was written down about this place. Not something that was. Something that's going to be."

Richard looked at the glasses.

"Going to be."

"That's what he says."

"Who wrote it?"

Clifford looked at Chris. Chris looked at the forge.

"Somebody who was there," said Chris.

* * *

Richard put them on.

For a moment nothing happened. The square through clear glass. Bailey's. The forge. The crossing. People. Lamps.

Then it went.

Not dark. Not bright. It went the way a slide goes in an old projector, when the carousel turns: a flicker, a click he felt behind his ear more than heard, and then a different picture in the same frame.

Station Square.

The same square. He knew it at once, the way you know your own hand. The station on the left, the old building, the canopy, but the canopy was new, cast iron, painted green, the way it had been in 1900 in the photograph over the fireplace at Bailey's. Bailey's on the corner, pale brick, big windows, a little greyer, a little older, with ivy on the side wall. The forge across the way, but longer now, much longer, going back and back with a glass roof along the ridge and smoke coming out of three chimneys, not one, and a sign over the big doors he could not quite read.

And between them, where the tarmac had been, where the buses turned and the taxis waited and the hoardings had stood for five years saying *COMING 20*, trees.

Planes. London planes, big ones, forty years old, in a double row, with their leaves going gold at the edges, and benches under them, and paving, granite, laid in a fan pattern from the station doors outwards, the way he had drawn it on the third version and then rubbed out because the council would never pay for granite. Children running across it. A woman with a pushchair. Two old men on a bench under the nearest plane with a chessboard between them. A café with tables out.

And down the middle of Torbay Road, coming up from the sea towards the station, with its bell going, a tram.

Green and cream. Open top. Full of people.

Richard stood on the kerb by the zebra crossing in Station Square on a Saturday evening in September 2028 with a pair of black glasses on his face, and watched a tram come up Torbay Road

in a year he would not live to see, and stop at the station, and the people get off, and walk across his square under his trees.

He looked at the nearest bench. The one with the chess players.

There was a brass plate on the back of it. He had drawn that bench. He had drawn it in 2026, for Walter, for the old man who had sat in his chair by the window and watched the glass come off the towers, and the council had never built it, and there it was. And the plate on the back of it, worn, polished by hands, said something he could not read from this distance.

He took a step towards it. Then another. He did not know he was doing it. He was in the road. Somebody hooted. He did not hear.

He got close enough. He read it.

SOMEWHERE TO WORK AND SOMEWHERE TO SIT.

And underneath, smaller:

R. drew this square in 2026. They said it would never be built.

* * *

He sat down on the kerb.

He did not decide to. His legs did it. He sat down on the kerb outside Bailey's in Station Square, by the zebra crossing, with the black glasses still on his face and his hands on his knees, and looked at the tram, and the trees, and the bench, and the children, and the brass plate he would never touch.

He sat there for forty minutes.

Nobody went near him. Chris stood a little way off by the bus shelter with his good hand in his pocket and did not say anything. Clifford went and sat in the blue car with the three women. People going into Bailey's looked at the old man on the kerb in the strange glasses and went round him.

After a while Fred came across from the forge with a mug of tea, black to the elbows, and put it down on the kerb beside Richard, and did not say anything either, and went back.

Richard did not drink it.

At ten past seven he took the glasses off. Station Square came back. Tarmac. Buses. The barriers coming down at the crossing, bells going. The forge with its one chimney. No trees. No tram. No bench.

He held the glasses in his lap for a long time.

Then he said, to nobody, to the square, quite quietly:

"I'm still angry."

And Chris, by the bus shelter, said, "I know."

And Richard laughed. Once. Short. The way a man laughs when something has given way inside him that was holding up a great weight, and he has discovered that he is still standing.

He picked up the tea Fred had brought him. It was cold. He drank it anyway, all of it, sitting on the kerb.

Then he got up, slowly, with a hand on the bollard, and gave the glasses back to Clifford, and walked home up the hill to his drawing board, to do the trees.

Chapter 16 – *Torbay Road*

Sun. 1 Oct. 2028. Torbay Road, Paignton, 6.10 a.m. to 6.52. V. walked it station to sea with her eyes shut. Rani a yard behind her the whole way. V. touched nothing she shouldn't. Walked round two things that aren't there. At the bottom she sat on the sea wall and cried. Then she rang Singapore.

Vicky Ooi had been told, all her life, that she did not have an imagination.

Her mother had told her, at eight, when she drew a house and it had exactly the right number of windows. Her teachers at Raffles Girls' had told her, kindly, in reports, *Victoria is diligent and precise*. A boyfriend in London had told her, when she was twenty-six, at the end, in a restaurant in Soho, *the trouble with you, Vicky, is you can only see what's in front of you*. She had agreed with him. She still did. She was good at what was in front of her. She was very good at it. That was why Mr Tan had sent her to Torbay.

Find me sites, he had said. *Not dreams. Sites.*

She had found him sites. She had also found a carer, an engineer, an old architect, a forge, a fire, a storm, and a town that had been told for forty years that nothing would ever change, and had believed it, and then had watched the barriers lift. She had been in Torbay two and a half years. She had a flat above a bakery on Hyde Road and a lamp over her head so bright that the waiters at Bailey's walked into doors, and a grain of rice behind her left ear that let her see who everybody answered to.

She had not, in two and a half years, imagined anything.

So when Clifford held out the black glasses to her at six o'clock on a Sunday morning, at the top of Torbay Road, by the level crossing, with the sun not up yet and the street empty and grey and the barriers lifted and silent, she looked at them the way she looked at a spreadsheet somebody had handed her with the totals hidden.

"Richard sat on the kerb for forty minutes," she said.

"Yes."

"He hasn't said what he saw."

"No," said Clifford. "He says he's still angry. He says he's doing the trees."

Vicky looked at the glasses.

"I am not Richard," she said. "I do not have an imagination."

"Buddy," said Clifford, "neither do the glasses. That's kind of the point. They don't show you what you imagine. They show you what somebody wrote down."

She put them on.

* * *

Rani was with her. Rani had asked to come. She stood a little way off by the bus shelter in a dark jacket with her hands in her pockets, very still, the way Rani stood everywhere now since the implant. Watching. Not Vicky. The street. Waiting.

"I'll be behind you," Rani said. "The whole way. If you need me, say."

"Why would I need you?"

Rani did not answer that. She only looked at Vicky, the way she had been looking at people since the Friday at Bailey's, with that long, level, patient look, as if she could see the end of something and was waiting for you to get there.

Vicky turned round, and faced down Torbay Road, and looked.

* * *

It went the way Richard had said it would go, the only thing he had said. *Like a slide in a projector.* A flicker. A click behind her ear, behind the grain of rice, that she felt in her teeth. And then the same street, in the same frame, and not the same street at all.

Torbay Road. From the station to the sea. Five hundred yards, a little downhill, straight, the shops on both sides, two and three storeys, the sea at the bottom a grey stripe under a grey sky. She knew it the way she knew her own office. She had walked it a thousand times. She had a spreadsheet of it: every unit, every lease, every owner, every rent, every empty window, every company in Jersey.

It was not grey.

It was early morning there too, wherever *there* was, the light coming up gold from the sea at the bottom, long, along the street. And the street was green.

Down the middle, where the traffic had been, where the buses went nose to tail on a Saturday and the taxis waited with their engines running, there was a double line of trees. Young ones, not big, ten or fifteen years old, limes, with their leaves going yellow at the edges, in a long avenue from the station to the sea. And between the two lines of trees, set into the paving, two steel rails, polished bright, going down the hill.

Tram lines.

On either side of the trees, paving. Wide. People walking. Not many, at that hour. A man with a dog. Two women with coffees. A boy on a bicycle, ringing his bell. And the shops.

She looked at the shops.

* * *

They were not shops. Not the way she knew shops. Not phone covers and vapes and charity and nail bars and TO LET.

The first one on the left, where the old shoe shop had been, the unit the White Rock firm had taken in 2027, had a glass front all the way up two storeys, and inside, she could see, behind the glass, long white benches, and people in white coats bent over them, and a sign above the door in plain steel letters: *LIGHTWAVE PHOTONICS. EST. 2027.* Under it, smaller: *Ask us what we make.*

The second was a bakery, a real one, with the ovens visible at the back and bread in the window.

The third had its doors open onto the street and a smell coming out of it that she knew from her own childhood, that went straight through her chest: chilli and lemongrass and frying shallots and coconut. A hawker stall. No: a row of them, inside a long room with a tiled floor and long shared tables and ceiling fans, six or seven stalls along the back wall, with their signs up in English and Chinese and Malay. Torquay laksa. Brixham fish head curry. Char kway teow. Somebody had painted, on the wall above them, very large: *HAVE YOU EATEN?*

Vicky stood very still at the top of Torbay Road.

* * *

She walked.

She did not decide to. She was a woman who decided things. She did not decide this. Her feet went, the way your feet go down a staircase in your own house in the dark.

She walked down the left-hand pavement. The real one, under the glasses: she could feel it, cracked, uneven, the tarmac patched. The other one, the one she was seeing, smooth granite, pale, with a little line of brass set into it every so often, she did not know what for. Past the photonics building. Past the bakery. Past the hawker hall with its smell.

She shut her eyes.

She did not know why. Afterwards she would say it was because she wanted to know if it would stay. Because she did not believe it, and the way to test a thing you do not believe is to take away the thing you are seeing it with, and see if it is still there.

It was still there.

Behind her eyelids, in the dark, Torbay Road went on. Gold light from the sea. The trees. The rails. The shops. As clear as with her eyes open. Clearer. It was not coming through the glasses. It was coming through the grain of rice behind her ear. It was coming through *her*.

She kept walking with her eyes shut.

* * *

Rani was a yard behind her. Vicky could hear her: soft footsteps, steady, unhurried, exactly her own pace. She did not say anything. She did not touch Vicky's arm. She just came.

Vicky walked down Torbay Road at ten past six on a Sunday morning with her eyes shut and a pair of black glasses on her face, and saw.

A school. Where the old bank had been, the empty one with the cash machine boarded up. A school, small, primary, with a playground at the side behind railings painted blue, and children's paintings in the windows. Fish. A lighthouse. A tram.

A row of flats above the shops, three storeys, with balconies, and every balcony full of green. Plants in pots, tomatoes, a lemon tree, washing on a line, a man in a vest on a chair with a cup of tea reading a newspaper. People living over the shops. People living on Torbay Road. The way they had in 1900, in the photograph over the fireplace at Bailey's, before everybody moved out to the estates and the street became a place you drove through.

A cinema. The old Picture House, halfway down on the right, the one that had been boarded up since before she came, with its little dome. Open. Its doors painted green. A poster outside she could not read.

A workshop with its doors open, and in it a woman at a lathe, and wood shavings on the pavement.

A shop that sold nothing but bicycles, and mended them.

A shop that made glass, and in its window, catching the gold light from the sea, a single blue glass bowl on a stand.

And the tram.

She heard it before she saw it. A bell. Behind her, up the hill, at the station. *Ding. Ding.* And then the hum of it, low, electric, coming down the rails between the trees, and she stopped, with her eyes shut, on the pavement, and turned her head, and watched it come.

Green and cream. Open top. Empty, at that hour, except for a driver in a cap and an old woman on the top deck with a shopping bag. It went past her down the hill towards the sea, slowly, its bell going at the crossing by the Picture House, and she watched it go all the way down to the bottom of the road, where the road met the front, and turn along the sea, and be gone.

* * *

She walked into a bench.

Not a real one. She walked round a real one, without knowing it, a council bench outside the vape shop, her feet going round it the way her feet went round everything, and in doing it she walked into a bench that was not there, a wooden one under one of the lime trees in the middle of the road, and her shins went through it, and she gasped, and stopped, and put her hand out.

Rani's hand was there. On her elbow. Light. Gone again.

"All right?" said Rani.

"There's a bench," said Vicky. "Under a tree. I walked into it."

"There isn't," said Rani.

"I know."

Rani did not say anything else. Vicky felt her step back. A yard. Waiting.

Vicky stood with her eyes shut on the pavement of Torbay Road, outside a vape shop that was there and a lime tree that was not, and she began, very quietly, to laugh, because she had just been told by a bench that did not exist that she did not, after all, entirely lack an imagination.

Or that she did, and something else had one for her.

* * *

She walked round two more things that were not there. A lamp post, old-fashioned, cast iron, painted green. A cycle rack. Her feet found them and went round them and she let them, and she did not walk into anything that was. Not once. Not the real bins, the real bollards, the real bus stop, the real A-board outside the café that had been put out early. Rani said afterwards that she had watched her go round every one of them, real and unreal, with her eyes shut, the way a blind woman goes down a street she has lived on all her life.

Halfway down, outside where the hawker hall would be, on the other side, there was a café.

Tables out on the pavement, under the trees, in the early light. Most of them empty. One with a woman at it.

An old woman. Seventy, perhaps. Small and straight, with grey hair cut very short and neat, in a dark linen shirt, with a newspaper folded in front of her and a cup of coffee, black, and reading glasses

on the end of her nose. Chinese. Singaporean. Vicky knew the way she sat. She knew the shape of the hands round the cup.

She had seen those hands every morning of her life, in the mirror, on the keyboard, on the steering wheel, on the cup.

The old woman at the café table looked up from her newspaper. Across Torbay Road, between the lime trees, over the tram rails, at the place on the pavement where a woman of forty-two was standing with her eyes shut in a pair of black glasses in a year that had not happened yet.

She looked straight at her. As if she could see her.

And she nodded. Once. Very slightly. The way you nod to somebody across a room when there is nothing that needs to be said.

Then she went back to her newspaper.

* * *

Vicky did not remember the rest of the walk. Rani said she did it at the same pace, steady, all the way down, past the Picture House and the glass shop and the bicycle shop and the last of the trees, to the bottom, where Torbay Road ran out into the front, and the sea was there, and the sun was coming up out of it, red, over Berry Head, the real sun, over the real sea, which was the same in both.

At the sea wall she stopped, and opened her eyes, and took off the glasses.

Torbay Road. Grey. Tarmac. Bins. A bus stop. The vape shop. The nail bar. TO LET. A gull on a bin, pulling at a chip paper. No trees. No rails. No school. No hawker hall. No café. No old woman with her newspaper.

Vicky sat down on the sea wall with the glasses in her lap and her back to the sea and looked up Torbay Road, the whole length of it, five hundred yards, a little uphill, to the station at the top, and the level crossing with its barriers up.

And she cried.

She had not cried since her father's funeral in 2019. She cried on the sea wall at the bottom of Torbay Road at seven o'clock on a Sunday morning, with a gull watching her and a woman with a grain of rice behind her ear sitting a yard away on the wall, not touching her, not saying anything, looking at the sea.

* * *

When she had finished she wiped her face with the back of her hand and took out her phone.

It was two in the afternoon in Singapore. Sunday. He would be at home. He would be at the table by the window, forty-two floors above the port, with the papers.

He answered on the second ring.

"Vicky."

"Mr Tan." She looked up Torbay Road. "You asked me, two years ago, before your board met, whether we should stay in Torbay or go home. I said I would tell you when I knew."

A silence on the line. Then, carefully: "And do you know?"

"Yes," said Vicky Ooi. "I'm staying."

"For how long?"

She thought about an old woman at a café table, under a lime tree, with a newspaper and a black coffee, looking up across the tram rails, and nodding.

"For good," she said.

There was a long pause on the line, from forty-two floors above the port, seven thousand miles away.

"Good," said Mr Tan. "So am I."

Chapter 17 – *Who Runs Torbay*

Tues. 3 Oct. 2028. Castle Circus, Torquay, 11.40 a.m. Mrs Eden's car outside the Town Hall. In at 11.25. Out at 11.39, on Steve's arm, very white, hand over one eye. Robinson at his window upstairs, watching her go. Smiling.

Steve had not looked in a mirror for a month.

He had tried. In the first week of September, like everybody, he had stood in front of the bathroom mirror in his flat in Torquay with the light off and looked at the air above his own head, sideways, the way the children on the news said. He had seen a lamp. He had looked away before he could see what it was like.

He knew why. He had always known why, ever since he was eight and his father had put his school report down on the kitchen table and said *well, you're not stupid, I'll give you that, but you're not much else*. Steve had spent thirty-six years being not stupid and not much else. He did not want to know, from a light in the air, whether his father had been right.

So he had not looked. For a month. He shaved by feel. He had taken the mirror off the wall in the hall and put it face down behind the sofa.

He saw it anyway on Tuesday, in the back of Mary Eden's car, in the glass of the partition between the back seat and the driver, at ten past eleven on the road down into Torquay.

He did not mean to. The car went into the shade of the trees on Lincombe Drive and the glass went dark, and there it was, reflected, his own face, pale, a little too fleshy at the jaw, in a suit that was a little too new. And above it, a lamp.

Bright.

Not a little bright. Bright. Steady and clear and amber, almost yellow, the kind he had seen over the heads of the Lightwave men in the photographs in the *Herald*, the kind the children pointed at.

And beside it, in the same dark glass, Mary Eden's.

Dimmer.

Not dim. Not like the planning chairman's, or the three officers', whom the whole public gallery had laughed at. But dimmer than his. Plainly. A steady, cool, middling glow, like a lamp in a window you are driving away from.

The car came out of the trees into the sun and the glass went clear and the reflections went. Steve sat very still in the back seat with his iPad on his knee and looked at the back of the driver's neck.

Beside him, Mary Eden was looking out of the window at the sea. She had not seen. She did not look at reflections. She never had. She had always said that people who looked at their own reflections were people who were not sure what they would find.

Steve was sure now. He did not know what to do with it.

* * *

The Mayor's office was on the first floor of the Town Hall at Castle Circus.

Robinson had chosen it. He could have had an office in Exeter, at the new combined authority in a glass building by the motorway, with a car park and a canteen and a view of a roundabout, and he had turned it down on the second day. *I was born in Torquay*, he had said to the *Herald*. *I was a policeman in Torquay for thirty-four years. I shall be Mayor in Torquay.* And he had taken the old committee room at the front of the Town Hall, above the steps, with its tall windows onto Castle Circus and its oak panelling and its

painted ceiling, and had the council move the planning files out of it into a basement.

There was a portrait over the fireplace. Steve noticed it as they came in. An old man in a frock coat and a high collar, with side-whiskers and a heavy, handsome, pleasant face, looking down at the room with an expression of great good humour. A brass plate on the frame. *Supt. Thomas Robinson, Torquay Borough Police, 1906–1921.*

The Mayor stood up when they came in.

He was seventy. Tall, still. Grey, well cut, a good suit, dark, with a regimental tie. A handsome, easy, pleasant face, the face in the portrait sixty years older, and a way of standing with his hands clasped behind his back that made it look as if he owned the room and had been kind enough to let you into it. He came round the desk. He took Mary Eden's hand in both of his.

"Mrs Eden. What a pleasure. Do sit down." He turned to Steve with the same smile, exactly the same, not a degree less warm. "And you'll be Steve. I've heard such a lot about you."

He had not, Steve thought. Nobody had heard anything about Steve. That was the point of Steve.

He sat down.

And then he looked, because he could not help it now, at the air above the Mayor's head.

* * *

It was bright.

Steve had not expected that. He did not know what he had expected. Something dim, like the councillors. Something you could laugh at. It was not dim. It was strong and steady and clear, as bright as his own, brighter, a good deep amber, the lamp of a man who could do the thing, whatever the thing was, and finish it.

That frightened Steve more than anything had frightened him in nine years.

Because he had always told himself, at the back of everything, that the people at the top were stupid. That was how he had lived with it. Mary was cruel, but she was clever, and the people under her were greedy and lazy and dim, and that was why the bay was the way it was: because the people running it could not run anything. He had believed that. It had been a comfort.

The Mayor's lamp was not dim. The Mayor could run anything he liked. He had simply run it the way he had been paid to.

* * *

Mary did not waste time. She never did.

"You know why I'm here," she said.

"I imagine it's the planning committee," said Robinson pleasantly. He had sat down again behind the desk and folded his hands on the blotter. "Thursday before last. I did watch the recording. Most unfortunate."

"It was a humiliation."

"It was certainly that."

"Six of the committee are ours. Six. And they sat there in front of three hundred people with lamps on their heads like the bottom of a jam jar and approved a scheme of Tan's nine votes to none, and could not have told you why." Mary's voice did not rise. It never rose. It went colder, and quieter, and more exact, the way the sea goes before a storm. "And the town laughed at them. On camera. It is on the internet. It has been watched two million times."

"Four," said Robinson. "This morning."

"The committee must go. All of them. They cannot be seen in public now without the town laughing. They are no use to anybody."

"I agree," said Robinson.

Mary paused. Steve saw it. A fraction of a pause.

"Good," she said. "Then you will replace them. In the new year. With people whose lamps will stand up to being looked at. I'll give you the names."

* * *

Robinson did not answer at once.

He sat behind the big desk in the old committee room with his hands folded on the blotter and looked at Mary Eden with his pleasant face, and smiled, a little, the way a man smiles at a child who has explained something to him that he learned forty years ago.

"Mrs Eden," he said. "May I tell you something?"

"Go on."

"You've come to tell me who runs Torbay," said Robinson. "I know. I've always known. I knew in 1992, when I was a detective inspector and I stood at the top of Berry Head and looked at a fence post and said *kids*." He did not look away from her. "I knew in 2006, when a young constable called Hills asked for a transfer to CID and I wrote *not suitable* on the form without reading it. I knew in May, when I stood on the stage at Westpoint with this round my neck." He touched his tie, where the chain would hang. "I've known since I was nine years old, when my grandfather sat me on his knee in his house in Chelston and showed me that portrait and said, *That's your great-grandfather, Tom. He carried envelopes for the Edens. And so do we*."

He smiled.

"I carry envelopes, Mrs Eden. It's what we do. My family has carried envelopes in this town for a hundred and thirty years, and we have done very well out of it, and we have never once asked what was in them." He spread his hands on the blotter. "So please.

You don't need to tell me who runs Torbay. I know whose envelopes I carry."

"Then we understand each other."

"Oh, we do," said Robinson pleasantly. "We do. But I'm not sure you've understood the rest of it."

He stood up. He went to the tall window behind the desk, the one that looked out over Castle Circus, and stood at it with his back to them, with his hands clasped behind him.

"The envelopes," he said, to the window, "have never been yours."

* * *

Steve saw Mary go still.

He had worked for her for nine years and he had never once seen her be surprised. He saw it now. Not on her face. Her face did not move. In her hands. They were folded in her lap, on her handbag, and the right one tightened on the left, very slightly, the knuckles going white, the way you tighten your grip on a rail when the floor moves.

"I beg your pardon?" she said.

"I carry envelopes for the Edens," said Robinson, still at the window. "Yes. For you, and your grandmother, and hers. But the Edens have always carried them for somebody else. Haven't they?" He did not turn round. "Your great-great-grandfather knew that, on the Plain, at the end. *I am the hand. You have not found the arm.* It's in a policeman's notebook somewhere, I'm told. There's always been somebody behind the hand." He paused. "I've met her, Mrs Eden. She came to see me in June. In this office. She sat in the chair you're sitting in." He turned his head, a little, so that Steve could see the side of his face, smiling. "She looked about forty."

Mary did not say anything.

Steve looked at the Mayor's lamp. Bright and steady over his grey head against the window. He looked at it the way the children did, sideways, out of the corner of his eye.

He could not see cords. He had not had the implant. He had read about it, he had heard Mary on the phone about it, *those women of Rage with things in their heads*. He could not see where Robinson's lamp went.

But he did not need to. He knew. He had known since the first week of April, since a voice in a hall saying *nobody is ever nobody*, since a door open in a house that nobody had opened. Mary's envelopes went up the stairs. To the room at the end of the landing. And Robinson's went past Mary, past the hand, straight up the same stairs, as if she were not there at all.

* * *

The Mayor turned round from the window.

The sun was behind him. It came in through the tall glass and lit up the edges of him, the broad shoulders in the dark suit, the grey hair. And it lit the thing on the desk beside him that Steve had not noticed when they came in, because it had been lying there in a red leather case with the lid open, the way you would leave out a thing you had just taken off.

The chain of office.

Heavy. Gold. Links as big as a child's hand, enamelled, gilt, with a badge hanging from the middle of it, the arms of the new county, a ship and a castle and a tower. He had worn it that morning, he said, for a school. He picked it up, carelessly, the way you pick up a scarf, and the links slid through his fingers with a sound like coins on a counter.

"There's a ceremony at the end of the month," he said. "In Station Square. After all the trouble, all this business with lamps. The town needs to see its Mayor. Bunting, and a band, and the

chain. Somebody suggested the twenty-sixth." He smiled. "A Thursday. I'm told it'll rain."

He put the chain round his neck. Easily. Over the dark suit. The gold lay across his shoulders and on his chest, catching the sun from the window. He turned back to the window, to look out at Castle Circus, with his back to them, and lifted one hand to wave to somebody in the street below.

A broad back, in a dark coat.

A chain, lying on the dark cloth.

A hand, lifted.

Steve heard Mary make a sound.

* * *

It was not loud. A small sharp intake of breath, the sound you make when you put your hand on something hot. He turned. She was sitting very straight in the chair, the chair the woman who looked forty had sat in, with her hands white on her handbag, and her face had gone the colour of paper, and her left hand came up, slowly, and pressed flat over her left eye.

"Mrs Eden?"

"It's nothing."

It was not nothing. He could see it. She was looking past the hand at something that was not in the room. Her right eye was fixed on the Mayor's back, on the chain, on the hand lifted at the window, and it was wide, and wet, and it did not blink.

She was seeing it. Whatever she saw at night, with the blinds down and the flannel over her face. Steve had never known what it was. She had never told anybody. He saw now that she was seeing it in daylight, in an office in the Town Hall, with her eyes open, and that it was the man at the window.

"Steve," she said, very quietly. "I'd like to go now."

He stood up. He did not know what else to do. He took her arm. He had never touched her before, not once in nine years, not to shake hands. Her arm was thin under the good wool of her jacket and it was shaking.

Robinson turned round from the window with the chain on his chest and saw them, and his pleasant face showed concern, perfectly judged.

"Mrs Eden. Are you unwell? Shall I call somebody?"

"A migraine," said Mary Eden. Her voice was quite steady. "I get them. It will pass. Thank you, Mayor."

"Of course. Of course. Do look after yourself." He came round the desk, the chain swinging, and opened the door for them. "We'll talk again. Soon. Before the twenty-sixth."

* * *

Steve got her down the stairs. Down the wide stone staircase with the brass rail, one step at a time, with her hand on his arm and her other hand over her eye. Out through the big doors and down the steps into Castle Circus, into the sun, where the driver was waiting with the car door open.

She got into the back. She did not let go of his arm until she was sitting down.

Then she let go, and sat with her head back against the leather and both hands over her face.

Steve stood on the pavement by the open door.

He looked up. At the Town Hall. At the tall window on the first floor, above the steps.

The Mayor was standing at it. Looking down at them. The chain on his chest catching the sun. His lamp bright and steady over his grey head. Smiling.

Steve got into the car. The door closed. The car pulled away, round Castle Circus and up the hill, towards Lincombe Drive and the trees and the house above Daddyhole Plain.

Neither of them said anything for a long time.

Then, as the car went into the shade of the trees, Mary Eden spoke without taking her hands from her face.

"Steve."

"Yes, Mrs Eden."

"The man in the chain." A long pause. "Did he look to you like a man who is going to die?"

Steve looked at the dark glass of the partition. At his own reflection in it. At his own lamp, bright, over his own head. At hers, dimmer, beside it.

"I don't know, Mrs Eden," he said.

It was the first time in nine years he had told her he did not know something, and not been afraid.

Chapter 18 – *Haytor*

Mon. 9 Oct. 2028. Haytor, lower car park, 6.48 a.m. First frost. No wind. Ania on Haytor at dawn. Three grey dogs sitting round her. Not moving.

Mr Ashby lived at Haytor Vale in a granite cottage with a slate roof and a garden that went up the hill behind it into bracken, and he was ninety-two, and he did not like to be got up before seven, and he did not like to be got up after it either.

"Seven," he had said to the agency, in 2025, when Jono first took him on. "Not five to. Not five past. Seven. My father milked at seven for fifty years and I've got up at seven every day since he died and I'm not changing now for some girl with a clipboard."

So Jono left Preston at six on Monday morning, in the dark, with a flask on the passenger seat, and drove up out of the bay on the Bovey road with the heater on full and the frost coming white on the hedges in his headlights, the first of the year. Up through Liverton and Ilsington, the lanes narrowing, the hedges rising on both sides like walls. Up onto the edge of the moor, where the hedges fell away and the road came out onto open ground, and the sky opened, and in front of him, against the first grey of the east, there was the tor.

Haytor. Two great humps of granite on the skyline, like a pair of shoulders, black against the grey. He had seen it every day of his life from somewhere in the bay. From Berry Head, from the pier, from his mum's back bedroom in Preston on a clear day. It stood over Torbay the way the lighthouse stood over Brixham. You stopped seeing it.

He saw it this morning.

He was early. He was always early for Mr Ashby. He pulled into the lower car park, the big one under the tor with the visitor centre shut up and dark, to drink his tea and wait for seven, the way he did every Monday. He turned the engine off. The silence came down, the enormous Dartmoor silence that is not like any other silence, that has the whole of the sky in it.

And he looked up at the tor through the windscreen, the way he did every Monday, and there was somebody on it.

* * *

On the top. On the right-hand hump, the higher one, the one with the iron steps cut into it that the Victorians had put in so ladies in long skirts could climb it. Right on the top, where nobody went at this hour, sitting on the granite against the grey sky.

A small figure. Very straight. Hands in the lap. Facing east. Towards the sea.

Jono knew who it was before he had got his binoculars out of the glove box. He knew the way you know your own mother's walk from the other end of a street. But he got them out anyway, and wound the window down so the glass would not mist, and put them up.

Ania.

In her grey costume. No coat. Sitting on the very top of Haytor at seven o'clock on the first frosty morning of October with nothing over her shoulders but the dark, her hands folded in her lap, looking east at the line of grey over the sea where the sun was going to come up.

And round her, on the granite, three grey dogs.

* * *

He thought they were dogs. He wrote *dogs* in his pocketbook. He would cross it out later and write it again, the way he had

crossed out *what he felt* on the night of the monastery roof and written it again underneath, and then, later still, he would put a line through the second one too, and leave it.

They were grey. They were big. Bigger than any dog he had ever seen, and he had been in the police dog section's kennels at Middlemoor in 1993 and stood face to face through the wire with a German shepherd called Kaiser who weighed more than he did. These were bigger. Long in the body. Deep in the chest. Long legs. Heads like wedges.

And they were sitting.

That was the thing. That was what he wrote down, and what he would come back to. They were not moving. Not lying down, not prowling, not sniffing about the rocks the way dogs do. Sitting. Upright. On their haunches. Three of them, in a ring round her on the granite, one at each side and one behind, facing outward. Away from her. North, south and west. Like sentries. Like the stone lions at the foot of a monument. So still that if he had not known what they were he would have thought they were part of the rock.

And Ania sat in the middle of them with her hands in her lap, looking east, and did not move either.

Jono sat in the car with the binoculars to his eyes and his tea going cold on the dashboard, and did not move.

* * *

He knew where he had read it. He had read it fifty times. In the second of Jack's books, the one with the corner burned, Saturday the twenty-eighth of March 1896, the morning they went up Hound Tor after Charles Eden. *Ania walked past Holmes. She did not hurry.* And the grey shapes at the edge of the mist, all round the hill, closing in, and the voices. And Ania going to the edge of the hollow in the rock, and standing there, and lifting her head.

And the sun coming up.

And the voices stopping.

Jack had never written *she calmed them*. Jack did not write things like that. He wrote what he saw. *Ania walked to the hollow. Sun came up. HER BREATH SHOWED. First time. The howling stopped.* And in the long account he wrote afterwards, the one in his own hand that Jono had read until the pages went soft: *They had gone quiet near her.*

That was the story. Everybody in the family knew it. Grandad Douglas had told it to Jono in Pimlico when Jono was eleven, in his hard chair with the light behind him. *She stood on Hound Tor and the grey ones went quiet. They always go quiet near her. That's what she's for, Jono. Partly. Keeping them quiet.*

Jono put the binoculars down on his knee and looked at the tor without them. The small figure on the top. The three still shapes around her.

Keeping them quiet.

He picked up the pencil.

Ania on Haytor at dawn. Three grey dogs sitting round her. Not moving.

He looked at it. Then, underneath, because he was a Hills and it was what you did, he wrote what he thought, and put it in brackets so that whoever read it would know it was only thought:

(Keeping them calm. As in '96.)

* * *

He should have stayed in the car.

He knew that. He would know it for the rest of his life. He was a carer with a ninety-year-old to get out of bed in fourteen minutes and he was sitting in a car park under a granite tor at dawn with three animals on top of it that were bigger than any dog in England,

and the sensible thing, the only thing, was to stay in the car with the doors locked and drink his tea and go to Mr Ashby's at seven and write it down afterwards.

He got out of the car.

He did not know why. Afterwards he thought it was Jack. A hundred and thirty-two years of Hills, going up hills after things. He got out of the car into the frost and shut the door quietly and stood at the edge of the car park in the cold, with his breath going up white in front of him, and looked up the long slope of grass and bracken to the rocks.

It was a quarter of a mile. Further than it looked. Everything on Dartmoor is.

He started to walk.

* * *

He got halfway.

The grass was white with frost and it crunched under his boots, and the cold came up through the soles, and the air was so still and so cold that it hurt his chest. The light was coming. Behind him, over the sea, over the whole of Torbay laid out down there in the dark with its lamps still on, the sky was going from grey to a thin cold green. The bracken was rust-brown and stiff. A sheep watched him from a boulder and did not move.

Halfway up the slope, he stopped.

He did not decide to stop. His legs did it. The way Richard's had, on the kerb in Station Square. He stood in the frosted bracken with his breath going up and looked up at the top of the tor, two hundred yards above him now, close enough to see properly without the glasses.

The three grey shapes had turned their heads.

Not their bodies. Not moving. Just their heads, all three, at the same moment, as one, the way a flock of birds turns. The one on the north side and the one on the south and the one behind her, on the west, the side that faced him. Turned. And looked down the hill at him.

He could see their eyes.

Pale. Yellowish, in the grey light. Not shining, the way a dog's eyes shine in headlights. Just pale. Looking at him with no expression at all. Not threat. Not hunger. Not anything he had a word for. The way the sea looks at you.

He stood very still.

He thought: *I should go back to the car.*

He did not move.

* * *

Ania did not turn round.

She sat on the top of Haytor in the middle of the three of them with her hands in her lap and her back to him, looking east. She must have known he was there. She always knew. She did not turn.

And then she lifted one hand. Not far. A few inches, off her lap, palm down. The way you lift a hand to quieten a room, or to tell a dog to stay.

The three heads turned back. All together. Away from him. North and south and west again. Still. Sentries.

Ania put her hand back in her lap.

Jono let his breath out. He had not known he was holding it. It went up in front of him, white, a long cloud, and hung in the still air, and drifted.

And he looked, then, because it was in his head from Jack's book and he could not help it, at the air in front of Ania's face. At

the cold air over the top of Haytor, at seven in the morning, on the first frost of the year, where every living thing on the moor was breathing out white. The sheep on its boulder. The three grey shapes around her: he could see it now, faint, a little white at each muzzle, going up. Himself.

Ania.

Nothing.

He looked for a long time. The sun was coming. The green over the sea was going gold at the bottom. The light came across the moor, long and level, from the east, and struck the top of the tor, and the frost on the granite lit up like broken glass, and the light fell on Ania's face, sitting very straight with her hands in her lap.

And there was no breath.

Not one. Not a wisp. In 1896, on Hound Tor, Jack had stood in the frost and watched the sun come up on her and seen her breathe for the first time, and written it down, and written underneath: *She had learned to do it.*

She was not doing it now.

* * *

He went back down the hill. Slowly. He did not turn his back on the tor until he was at the car.

At the car he looked up one more time.

The sun was up. Full. Gold. The whole of the moor lit up, every tor, every boulder, the frost going to water on the grass. And on the top of Haytor, Ania was sitting where she had been, very straight, in the sunlight, looking east.

On her own.

The rock around her was bare. No grey shapes. Not on the north side or the south or the west. Not on the slope, not in the

bracken, not going down into the valley. Nothing. The sheep on its boulder had lain down and was chewing. The light lay on the empty granite.

He had not seen them go. He had looked away for perhaps a second, to find the car door handle in the cold. A second. They had gone in it. *The shapes at the edge of the mist were not there.*

He got into the car and sat with his hands on the wheel. His tea was stone cold. It was two minutes to seven.

He wrote it down. All of it. The eyes. The heads turning. Her hand. The breath, and the not-breath. He wrote down that he had got out of the car, and that he should not have, and that he would do it again. Then he went back to the first line, the one he had written in the car before any of it, and looked at it.

Ania on Haytor at dawn. Three grey dogs sitting round her. Not moving.

(Keeping them calm. As in '96.)

He thought about crossing out the brackets. He did not know why he wanted to. It was what he had thought. It was what Grandad Douglas had told him she was for. It was what Jack had seen. *They always go quiet near her.*

He left it.

* * *

Mr Ashby was awake and sitting on the edge of the bed in his pyjamas with his feet in his slippers when Jono let himself in at seven exactly, and he looked at Jono's face as he came into the bedroom and said, "You've been up the tor."

Jono stopped in the doorway.

"How do you know that?"

"Frost on your trouser legs to the knee. Bracken in your laces. Face like a sheet." Mr Ashby reached for his teeth on the bedside table. "Saw 'em, did you?"

Jono did not answer.

The old man put his teeth in. He looked out of the bedroom window, up the hill behind the cottage, past the garden and the bracken, towards the tor, golden now in the full sun, with a small dark figure still sitting on the top of it.

"My grandad saw 'em," said Mr Ashby. "In the winter of the star. 1896. He was a boy of ten. Up here with the sheep at dawn." He was quiet a moment. "He said there was a lady on the tor with 'em. Sitting. In grey. And they sat round her like dogs round a fire."

Jono stood in the doorway with frost melting on his trousers.

"What did he think she was doing?" he said.

Mr Ashby looked at him over his glasses for a long time, the way old moor men look at you, as if they are weighing a ewe.

"He thought she was keeping 'em calm," he said. "That's what he always said. Keeping 'em calm." He reached for his dressing gown. "Course, he was only a boy."

"And what do you think?"

Mr Ashby stood up, slowly, with a hand on the bedpost, and put the dressing gown on, and tied the cord, and looked out of the window at the tor.

"I think," said Mr Ashby, "that whatever she's doing up there, I'm glad she's doing it up there." He turned round. "Breakfast, Jono. I want an egg."

Chapter 19 – *Philip*

Thurs. 21 Sept. 2028. Bailey's, public bar, quiz night, 9.50 p.m. A.H. sat in on a team of one. Man of about fifty, grey cardigan, lime cordial. Team name on the sheet: "Just Me." Changed it at half time to "Just Us." They came fourth. He laughed twice.

Annie Hall had been told to find his weak point, and she had found it in eleven seconds, and it was not the one anybody had expected.

"He's lonely," she said.

They were in the cellar under Studio Ania on the Monday, the eighteenth, with the screens on and Clifford's photographs of Philip Carew spread out on the long desk. Philip at the door of a solicitor's office in Union Street with a briefcase. Philip at a table outside a café on the Strand, alone, with a newspaper. Philip on Torquay seafront at dusk, walking, with his hands in the pockets of a long grey raincoat, looking at the sea.

"He's Eden's accountant," Clifford said. "Not the hotels. That's Steve. Philip does the other books. The real ones. Fourteen years. Nobody's ever got near him. He doesn't drink, he doesn't gamble, he's not on any app, he's never been married, he goes to work and he goes home and he goes to church in Cockington on a Sunday, and that's it." He tapped the photograph from the seafront. "We had a guy watch him for a month. He's the most boring man in Devon."

"He's not boring," said Annie. "He's lonely. Look at his shoulders."

They looked.

"He walks like a man who's been told all his life to take up less room," said Annie. "He holds the newspaper up in front of his face in a café so nobody will sit at his table, and then he looks over the top of it every time somebody comes in, in case they do." She picked up the photograph from the Strand. "He's not hiding from people. He's waiting for one."

Chris, in his chair by the kettle, said nothing. Keith, at the end of the desk with his hand on the stone, said nothing either, but Annie felt him look at her, the long look, the one he gave Rani.

She did not look back.

* * *

She had been a croupier on a cruise ship for six years in her twenties. Caribbean in the winter, the Baltic in the summer, three thousand passengers a week, every one of them wanting something. She had learned there what she knew. Not cards. People. You stood behind a roulette table for nine hours a night under the lights with the wheel going round and you watched faces, and by the end of the first season you could tell from the way a man put his chips down whether he would be back tomorrow, and whether he would be back the day after that, and whether, at three in the morning on the last night of the cruise, he would be standing at the rail on the top deck looking at the sea for too long.

You learned to see what people wanted. What they wanted more than they wanted the thing they said they wanted.

Philip Carew wanted somebody to sit at his table.

That was all. That was the weak point. Not money, not women, not drink. Somebody to look over the top of the newspaper at and find them still there.

Annie had not been told to like him. She had been told to find the way in. She sat in the cellar with his photograph in her hand and

thought, *God help me, this is going to be easy*, and then, a moment later, *and that's the worst thing about it*.

* * *

She did not go to the café on the Strand. She did not go to the seafront at dusk, or to church in Cockington. That was too much like hunting. Philip would feel it. Men like Philip always felt it; they had been hunted all their lives, by teachers and by bullies and by mothers, and they knew the sound of feet behind them better than anybody.

She waited for him to come to her.

He came to Bailey's on Thursdays. Clifford's man had found that out in the third week of the watching and thought nothing of it. Every Thursday since it opened in April, at eight, for the quiz. He sat at the small table in the corner of the public bar by the fireplace, under the old photograph of the square with the tram in it, on his own, with a lime cordial and a pencil, and did the quiz as a team of one, and wrote his team name at the top of the answer sheet in small neat capitals: JUST ME.

He usually came last. Not because he was stupid. Annie looked at his lamp the first Thursday, from behind the bar, through the grain of rice behind her ear, and his lamp was good: steady, clear, a solid twenty-three, the lamp of a man who could keep a set of books for fourteen years and never once get a figure wrong. He came last because he never answered the questions he was not certain of. He left them blank. A team of one, with nobody to argue with, and he left a third of the sheet empty every week rather than be wrong.

And the cord.

His cord went out of the bottom of his lamp and up, through the ceiling of the public bar, out over the town, south and east, up the hill. Annie knew where it went. Everybody in Rage knew. To a house above Daddyhole Plain. It was thin and taut and very old-

looking, the way a rope looks that has had a weight on it for a long time.

And about halfway along it, from where she stood behind the bar, she could see a place where it had frayed.

* * *

On the twenty-first she sat down at his table.

She did it at half past eight, just after the first round, when the bar was loud and the quizmaster was reading out the music clips and nobody was looking. She came out from behind the bar with two lime cordials on a tray, the way you would bring a regular something on the house, and put one down in front of him, and the other one down opposite, and sat in the empty chair.

He looked up from his answer sheet as if she had fired a gun.

"I'm sorry," said Annie. "Is this taken?"

He looked at the chair. Then at her. Then at the lime cordial. She watched him go through it, every possibility, the way a man goes through a set of accounts looking for the error. She watched him decide it was a mistake, and that she would realise in a moment, and go.

"No," he said. "No, it's... no."

"Good. Because I'm off for twenty minutes, and if I sit at the bar they'll make me work, and I'm terrible at the music round." She looked at his sheet. "What've you got for number three?"

He looked down at it. He had left it blank.

"I'm not sure," he said.

"Guess."

He looked at her as if she had suggested he take his clothes off.

"I don't guess," he said. "I'm an accountant."

Annie laughed. Not the laugh she used on the cruise ship, the bright one, the one that sold drinks. The other one. The real one. It came out of her before she could stop it, and he heard the difference. She saw him hear it.

"Well," she said, "I'm not. So I'll guess, and if it's wrong you can blame me."

She picked up his pencil, and turned the sheet round, and looked at the team name in its small neat capitals at the top.

JUST ME.

She did not change it. Not then. She wrote *Fleetwood Mac* next to number three, and gave him back the pencil.

It was right.

* * *

At half time he changed it himself.

She watched him do it. She had gone back behind the bar to pull pints and was watching him in the mirror behind the optics, the way you watch a roulette table from the cashier's window. He sat for a long time with the pencil over the top of the answer sheet. Then he crossed out *ME*, one neat line, and wrote above it, in the same small neat capitals, *US*.

He did not look round to see if she had seen.

She came back after half time and sat down. He did not say anything about it. Neither did she. They did the second half together, the history round and the geography round and a picture round of famous bridges that Annie got all ten of, because she had stood on most of them, one port or another, and Philip looked at her when she got the Pont des Arts as if she had performed a small miracle.

They came fourth. Out of fourteen.

When the quizmaster read it out, *in fourth place, Just Us*, Philip laughed. A short, surprised sound, as if it had been knocked out of him. Then he looked at the table, embarrassed, and then, a few minutes later, at something Annie said about the team that came last, he laughed again.

Twice.

From the back of the bar, in the doorway to the hall, Jono, who had come in for a half after a late call, wrote it down.

* * *

It was slow. It had to be slow. That was the only way it could work, and it was also, Annie came to understand in the second week, the thing that was going to hurt.

The next Thursday, the twenty-eighth, she did not sit with him at first. She let him wait. She watched him come in at eight and sit at the small table under the photograph and put his lime cordial down and write the team name on the sheet, and she watched from behind the bar as he wrote it, *JUST US*, and then sat looking at the door to the back, where she would come out from, for the whole of the first round.

She came out at half past. She sat down. He did not say anything. He pushed the answer sheet across to her with the music round on it, all blank, waiting.

They came third.

Afterwards he walked her to the taxi rank. He did not ask. He was simply there, at the door, in his long grey raincoat, at closing, when she came out, and he fell into step beside her across the square, and did not say anything, and she let him. At the rank he stood with his hands in his pockets and said:

"I don't really do this."

"Do what?"

"Talk to people." He looked at the forge across the way, where Fred was banking the fire. "My mother used to say I was a cold fish. She said it to the vicar, at my confirmation. *Philip's a cold fish, I'm afraid. Takes after his father.*" He smiled, very slightly, at the forge. "I was twelve. I've been trying to be warm ever since. I'm not very good at it."

Annie looked at him.

His lamp, in the dark of Station Square, steady and clear. His cord, going up and out over the rooftops towards the hill, thin, taut, frayed in the middle.

And, very faint, so faint that she would not have seen it if she had not had the thing behind her ear, so faint that for a moment she thought it was her own eyes, a second cord.

Coming out of the bottom of his lamp beside the old one. Not going up the hill. Going sideways. A foot. Eighteen inches. Across the pavement at the taxi rank in Station Square.

To her.

* * *

She did not sleep that night.

She lay in her flat above Bailey's, in one of the staff rooms on the top floor that Tan had given her when she came down from Bristol in 2027, and looked at the ceiling, and thought about Philip Carew walking her to a taxi rank and telling her that his mother had called him a cold fish in front of the vicar.

She had done this before. Not this exactly. But near enough. On the ship. A man at the table every night, getting closer, and Annie, under instructions from the pit boss, making sure he stayed and lost, and smiling. She had been good at it. She had never once felt anything about it except a sort of tired cleverness, like a long shift.

This was not that.

She got up at three and went to the bathroom and stood in front of the mirror with the light off and looked at the air above her own head.

Her lamp. Bright, steady, twenty-eight. Her own cord, going down, behind her, back through the wall and the floor and out under Station Square and along under the town to the cellar under Studio Ania, to the stone, to Keith's hand. Taut. Clear. She had seen it every night since the implant and it had never changed.

It had changed.

Beside it, faint, very faint, a thread. Not a cord. Not yet. A single thread of light, so thin it was hardly there, coming out of the bottom of her lamp and going off sideways, through the bathroom wall, out over the square, north, up the hill, towards the little terraced house in Chelston where Clifford's man said Philip Carew lived on his own with a cat and a piano he did not play.

Annie stood in front of the mirror in the dark and looked at it for a long time.

Not entirely cold, she thought.

She did not know whether she meant him or herself.

* * *

On the Monday she sat in the cellar and told them what she had. Chris and Clifford and Jono and Keith. She told them about the quiz, and the team name, and the taxi rank, and the cold fish. She told them that he kept the real books on paper, not on a computer, because a computer could be got into from outside and paper could not, and that he had told her that himself, at the taxi rank, laughing, as a joke against himself, *I'm the last man in England who still uses a ledger*. She told them he worked from home on Fridays. She told them he had asked her, at the rank, if she liked music, and she had

said yes, and he had said he had a piano he did not play, and she had said perhaps she would come and make him play it, and he had gone red to his ears.

She did not tell them about the thread.

Clifford was pleased. He said so. *That's great, Annie. That's real progress. That's ahead of where I thought we'd be.* Chris said nothing, and looked at his hands. Jono wrote it down.

Keith looked at her.

The long look. The one he had given Rani in the same room, three weeks ago, over the stone. Sad and patient, as if he could see the whole of a road laid out ahead of her, and where it went.

She looked back at him, this time. She made herself.

"You know how this ends," she said. "Don't you."

Keith did not answer for a long time. His hand was flat on the stone in its foam cradle. His two lamps, one behind the other, burned steady over his head.

"I know how I remember it ending," he said. "That isn't always the same thing."

"Will I hurt him?"

Keith turned his cup a quarter turn on the desk, by the handle.

"Yes," he said.

Annie nodded. She had known. She had wanted to hear somebody say it.

"Will he hurt me?"

Keith looked at her for a long time. Then he looked down at his cup.

"He's a cold fish," he said quietly. "His mother said so. To the vicar."

And that was all he said, and Annie understood it was all he was going to say, and that it was not an answer, and that it was.

Chapter 20 – *The Ledger*

Sat. 30 Sept. 2028. Bailey's, back room, 10.50 p.m. A.H. and K. She brought him a carrier bag. He read what was in it for twenty minutes. Then she kissed him. He let her. In the public bar C.H. was singing the one about the lighthouse.

Philip Carew played the piano for her at four o'clock on Saturday afternoon, and he played it badly, and it was the bravest thing Annie had ever seen a man do.

It was an upright, black, very old, against the wall of the front room of the little terraced house in Chelston, with a lace runner on top and a photograph of a woman in a hat in a silver frame and a cat asleep on the lid. He had not played it, he said, since 1991. His mother's. She had made him practise an hour every evening until he was sixteen and then she had died and he had shut the lid and not opened it again.

Annie had made him open it.

She had come at two, the way they had arranged at the taxi rank on Thursday, with a cake from the bakery on Hyde Road in a box, and he had opened the door in a clean shirt with the creases still in it from the packet and stood there looking at her as if she were weather he had not been told about. She had sat in his front room and drunk his tea, which was terrible, and eaten the cake, and talked about the ship and the Baltic and the bridges, and he had listened the way he listened to the quiz questions, with his whole face, leaving nothing blank. And at four she had got up and gone to the piano and lifted the cat off the lid and put it on the floor, and lifted the lid, and said:

"Go on, then."

He had looked at the keys for a long time.

Then he had sat down on the stool, and put his hands on them, and played.

Something by Schubert, he said afterwards. A thing his mother had liked. It was slow, and he got it wrong in four places, and once he stopped altogether and sat with his hands above the keys for so long that Annie thought he would close the lid. He did not close the lid. He found his place and went on. And at the end he sat with his hands in his lap and did not turn round, and his ears were red, and he said, to the piano:

"I knew on the first Thursday."

* * *

Annie stood very still behind him.

"Knew what?"

"Nobody sits at my table," said Philip Carew. He still did not turn round. "Nobody has sat at my table for fourteen years. Not in a café. Not in a pub. Not at work. Not at church. People sit at the other end of the pew." He touched a key, very lightly, not hard enough to make it sound. "And then a woman with a lamp over her head like a lighthouse comes out from behind the bar at Bailey's with two lime cordials and sits down at my table and guesses number three." He was quiet a moment. "I'm an accountant, Annie. I can add up."

She did not say anything. There was nothing she could say that would not be a lie, and she found that she did not want to lie to him, and that was new.

"I don't mind," said Philip.

He turned round on the stool.

His face was very pale and his ears were very red and he was looking at her with an expression she had seen once before in her life, on the top deck of the ship at three in the morning on the last night of a cruise, on a man standing at the rail looking at the sea. A man who has added it all up and got the answer and found that it does not frighten him as much as he thought it would.

"I don't mind," he said again. "I want you to understand that. Whatever it is. Whoever sent you. I don't mind. It was the best fortnight I've had since 1991." He stood up. "Wait here."

* * *

He went upstairs. She heard him in the back bedroom. A drawer. Then a sound she knew from the cruise ship, from the purser's office: the heavy click of a safe. Then his feet on the stairs.

He came back with a book.

A ledger. Foolscap, bound in green cloth gone dark and soft at the corners, the kind they used to sell in stationers in the sixties, with a red leather spine and gold lines. Thick. He held it against his chest with both arms, the way you hold a child.

"This isn't the one she has," he said. "This is mine. My copy." He looked down at it. "I've kept the books for the Edens for fourteen years, and every page I've ever written for them, I've written twice. Once for her. Once for me. In the evenings, at the kitchen table. In case." He almost smiled. "I told myself it was insurance. It wasn't. It was the only way I could bear it. Knowing there was one copy in the world she didn't have."

He held it out.

Annie looked at it.

"Philip," she said. "You don't know what—"

"I know exactly what," said Philip Carew. "It's every person in the Town Hall who's taken money from Mary Eden since 2014. And

from her mother before that, but I only have from 2014. Who, and how much, and when, and through which company, and what for." He was still holding it out. "Councillors. Officers. Two Leaders. A superintendent, before he was a Mayor, and after." His arms were shaking a little with the weight of it. "I've been waiting fourteen years for somebody to ask me for it. Nobody ever asked. Nobody ever sat at my table." He looked at her. "Take it. Please. Before I lose my nerve."

She took it.

It was heavier than she had expected. It was warm from his chest.

"There's one thing," said Philip.

"Anything."

He looked at the floor.

"Come back on Thursday," he said. "To the quiz. Even if you don't want to. Even if you've got what you came for. Just come and sit at the table." He looked up. "I'd like to come fourth again. Just once more."

Annie looked at him for a long time, with the ledger in her arms.

Above his head, his lamp. Steady, clear, twenty-three. The old cord going up and out through the ceiling towards the hill, taut, frayed.

Frayed through. As she watched. The last strands of it, at the place where it had worn, parting, very quietly, the way a thread parts when you have pulled it one time too many. The end of it going slack and drifting, like a kite string when the kite has gone.

And the other one, the new one, coming out of his lamp and across the front room, eighteen inches, to her. Not faint any more.

"Thursday," she said.

She did not know, when she said it, whether it was true.

* * *

Jono was at Bailey's because Chris was playing, and Chris was playing because he was the alibi.

Clifford had explained it, in the cellar, on Friday. *If Annie gets it, it goes to Keith. Keith goes nowhere public. Nobody's seen his face except us and a sergeant who wrote down a Lewisham address. But somebody up the hill knows there's a young man in Torbay who looks like Chris. So on the night Annie brings it in, I want Chris where three hundred people can see him. On a stool. In the public bar. With a guitar. And I want Keith in the back room with the door shut.*

So Chris was on his stool in the corner of the public bar by the fireplace, under the photograph of the square with the tram in it, with his guitar and his bad hand, playing with Ania's Rage to a bar so full that people were standing on the pavement outside looking in through the big windows. And Ania was at the front, very straight, in grey, setting the words down. And three hundred people were watching an old man with grey hair and a stroke play guitar on a Saturday night in Paignton, and filming it, and putting it on the internet.

And Jono stood in the doorway between the public bar and the hall, the way he had on the night of the gun, with a half he had not touched, and watched the room. And behind him, down the hall, the door to the back room was shut.

Annie came in at twenty past ten.

Not through the bar. Through the side door from the yard, the fire door, the way the gunman had gone out. She came down the hall past Jono with a Bailey's carrier bag in her hand, the paper kind with the gold name on it that they gave you when you bought a

bottle of wine to take home. She did not look at him. Her face was very white and very still, and her lamp, as she went past, was so bright it lit the wall.

She knocked on the back-room door once, and went in, and it closed.

Jono looked at the closed door for a long time.

Then he went and stood in the hall outside it, by the coats, where he could see through the glass panel at the top.

* * *

He told himself it was his job. Clifford had said, *somebody keep an eye on the back room*. He told himself that for the whole twenty minutes. He did not quite believe it.

Through the glass, the back room. Lamps on, low. The long deal table Richard had made for the fireplace end. Keith at the end of it, with his back to the wall, where he always sat. Annie across from him, standing. The carrier bag on the table between them.

She took the book out of it. A big green book, foolscap, old. She put it down in front of Keith and stood back.

Keith looked at it. He did not touch it for a long time. Then he opened it.

Jono watched him read. Twenty minutes. Keith turned every page. Slowly. His finger going down the columns. Every so often it stopped, and stayed, on a line, on a name, and Keith's face did not change, and then the finger went on. Once, about two-thirds of the way through, it stopped for a long time, and Keith shut his eyes. Then opened them, and went on.

Annie stood across the table with her arms folded and watched him. Not the book. Him.

From the public bar, through two walls, Jono could hear the band. The drums, the bass, and Chris's guitar, steady, and Ania's voice over it, every word the same length. They had started a new song. He knew it after four bars.

The one about the Mini and the lighthouse.

* * *

Keith closed the ledger.

He sat with his hand flat on the green cover. Then he looked up at Annie, and said something Jono could not hear through the glass. Two or three words. Annie did not answer. She stood there with her arms folded and her face very white, and then her face did something that Jono had seen on a great many faces in a great many rooms, on doorsteps at three in the morning, in hospital corridors, in the back of police cars. It came apart.

Not much. Not crying. Just the whole of it letting go at once, all the holding, the way a cord lets go when it has been pulled one time too many.

Keith stood up.

He came round the end of the table, slowly, and stood in front of her. He did not touch her. He stood there, a young man in a white shirt, with his old eyes, and said something else, quietly. Jono saw his lips move. He thought, afterwards, writing it down, that it might have been her name.

And Annie put her hands on his face, both hands, either side, and kissed him.

* * *

He let her.

That was what Jono wrote down. He wrote it down that night, at his kitchen table in Preston, at two in the morning, and looked at

it, and thought about crossing it out, and did not. *She kissed him. He let her.* He did not write that Keith kissed her back. He did not know if that was true. Through the glass panel in the back-room door, in the low light, with the lamps over their heads, it was not possible to tell. A young man standing still in the middle of a room with a woman's hands on his face, and his own hands at his sides, and his eyes shut.

It went on for a long time. Longer than it should have. Longer than a thank-you, or a sorry, or a goodbye.

And from the public bar, through two walls, Chris's voice, hoarse, sixty-six, singing the last verse.

Nose to the sea. And the lighthouse going round.

Jono went back to the doorway of the public bar.

He did not decide to. He found himself there, with his untouched half in his hand, looking across the crowd at the corner by the fireplace. At Chris on his stool with his head down over the strings, his bad hand doing the work anyway, his grey hair in the light. At the lamp over his head, middling, steady, eighteen, and the cord going out of the bottom of it that Jono could not see and Rani had told him about. South. Short and bright. To Brixham.

To a woman in a blue Fiesta parked in the dark on Berry Head, Jono thought, or on a kitchen chair in her mum's old house on the steps, with a tin on the mantelpiece, listening to this on her phone. Because it would be on the internet by midnight. Everything was.

Nose to the sea.

He had known Chris all his life. Since a knitted hat in a pew in Preston. He knew about all six women Chris had loved and lost, one after another, at eighteen months. He had watched some of it, and read the rest, and written down what he could in the thirty-second pocketbook without Chris ever knowing. He had watched Chris come home in 2018 to a woman on a platform who straightened his

collar. He had watched the two of them circle each other for ten years since, on the quay and the head and in her kitchen, not together and not apart, and he had never said a word, because it was not his to say.

And in the back room, behind two walls, a young man with Chris's face was standing with his eyes shut while a woman held it in her hands.

The same man. Jono knew that. He had known since a cup turned on a saucer in this building in April. The same man, ninety-five, in a borrowed face. Doing a thing that Chris, at sixty-six, on the stool, with his eyes on his strings and his heart in Brixham, would not have done.

Or would he? At thirty? Before he knew? Jono did not know. He did not think anybody knew. He thought perhaps that was the whole point of Keith, and the cruelty of him: that he was every age Chris had ever been, all at once, and you could never be sure which one you were looking at.

At eleven the back-room door opened and Annie came out.

She came down the hall past Jono without looking at him. Her face was perfectly composed. Her lamp was bright and steady. She went out through the fire door into the yard, and Jono heard her footsteps cross the tarmac towards the station car park, and stop, and then go on.

She had left the ledger.

Keith came out a minute later with the carrier bag under his arm. He stopped in the hall when he saw Jono.

They looked at each other.

Jono did not say anything. He did not need to. Keith's old eyes went over his face, the way they went over everybody's, checking, and found what was there, and did not look away.

"You saw," said Keith.

"Yes."

"Will you write it down?"

"I already have."

Keith nodded slowly.

"Will you tell her?" he said.

He did not say who. He did not need to say that either.

Jono looked past him, through the doorway, across the public bar, at Chris on his stool, who had finished the song and was sitting with his head down and his hand flat on the body of the guitar, the way you put your hand on something to stop it humming, while the bar clapped.

He thought about a woman on Berry Head with a lighthouse going round. About a tin on a mantelpiece with gold in it nobody had ever spent. About his own mother, who had said to him once, when Claire went, *the kindest thing you can do for somebody, Jonathan, is know a thing about them they'll never have to know*.

"No," said Jono. "Never."

He took out his pocketbook. He wrote, under the line he had written in the hall, in his square capitals: *Will not tell K.T. Not now. Not ever.*

He did not cross it out. He never did.

Keith stood in the hall with the ledger in a Bailey's carrier bag under his arm and watched him write it. Then he said, very quietly, "Thank you, Jono," the way he had said it on the night of the gun, in the back room, with a name nobody had told him.

And went out by the fire door into the dark, and was gone.

Chapter 21 – *Tarquin*

Tues. 3 Oct. 2028. Pimlico, Warwick Way, a tea merchant's, 3.15 p.m. Asked for a quarter of Darjeeling. Told him it was too dear. He laughed. Lady in the corner, grey, big round glasses, a crossword. Said nothing for an hour. Then said two things. Both for C.H.

Jono had been told the code when he was eleven, by his grandad, in Pimlico, in a hard chair by a window with the light behind it, and he had never once had cause to use it, and he had never once forgotten it.

Tuesday. A quarter past three. Ask for a quarter of Darjeeling. Tell them it's too dear.

"Who's *them*?" Jono had said. Eleven, swinging his legs, with a glass of orange squash he did not like.

"Whoever's behind the counter," said Grandad Douglas. "You'll know them when you see them. They'll know you." He had looked at Jono over his spectacles. "You might never need it. Your father never has. I hope you never do. But if you ever find yourself in London, Jonathan, with something in your pocket that's too heavy to carry on your own, that's what you do. And somebody will help you carry it."

Forty-four years later, at ten past three on a Tuesday afternoon in October, Jono stood on the pavement in Warwick Way with Clifford beside him and looked at a shop.

* * *

It was a narrow front between a dry cleaner's and a shop that sold expensive bicycles. Dark green paint, very old, very glossy.

Gold letters on the glass, old-fashioned, with shadows: *H. TALLAND & CO. TEA AND COFFEE. EST. 1947.* In the window, on a shelf, a row of big black tea canisters with gold labels, and a pair of brass scales, and a small handwritten card: *Darjeeling, First Flush, 2028. Just in.*

"You're kidding me," said Clifford.

"No," said Jono.

"Est. 1947. A tea shop. Your grandfather's been sending people to a *tea shop* for eighty years?"

"Somebody has." Jono looked at the gold letters. *H. Talland.* He had read that name in Wendy's book, in the back room at Widecombe Cot, the winter after Chris came home. *Lieutenant-Commander Talland, from the Admiralty. Which of you is RAGE?* In 1915. And again in 1943, in the back of a grocer's in Hendon, drinking three cups of Darjeeling with Harold Mallyon. And again, after the war, sending a quarter of Darjeeling every year to an old man called Achard in the Marais, with a card that said nothing but a name.

Hugh Talland. Dead in 1962. And his shop still here.

"Five minutes," said Jono. "We're early."

"Buddy, it's a tea shop. They're not going to—"

"Five minutes," said Jono. "It says a quarter past."

Clifford looked at him, and laughed, and shut up.

* * *

At a quarter past three exactly Jono pushed open the door.

A bell rang over it. A real bell, brass, on a spring. Inside, the shop was long and narrow and dark and smelled of tea, a great deal of tea, and wood polish, and something older underneath, like a church. Wooden drawers up to the ceiling with brass labels. A long

mahogany counter worn pale down the middle. Big copper canisters on a shelf. Brass scales.

It was the shop in his mother's book. Not Hendon. Not this one. But it was the same shop. Jono understood that standing in the doorway. Somebody had built this shop in 1947 to look exactly like a grocer's in Hendon in 1935, and had kept it that way for eighty years, so that a man who had read about the one would know the other when he walked into it.

There was a young man behind the counter.

Thirty-four, perhaps. Tall and fair and very well dressed, in a navy suit that had been made for him by somebody who knew what they were doing, with a white shirt and no tie, and a face that was handsome in the way that old portraits are handsome, long and narrow and amused. He was weighing something on the brass scales with a little brass scoop. He did not look up.

"Good afternoon," he said. He had a voice that had been to the right school and decided to be kind about it.

Jono went to the counter. He had his hands in his coat pockets. In the right-hand one, the pocketbook, the thirty-third. In the left, nothing at all.

"A quarter of Darjeeling, please," he said.

The young man looked up.

He had very pale grey eyes. He looked at Jono for a long time over the brass scales, steadily, the way Douglas had looked at people, the way Ingrid Petrick had looked at Chris in a hall in Hamburg in Chris's book, the way every person in this business seemed to look at you: checking you against a description.

"First flush?" he said. "Just in. Two pounds forty."

"Too dear," said Jono.

* * *

The young man put the scoop down.

He laughed. Not loudly. A short, delighted sound, like a boy who has been told a joke he has heard about all his life and never actually heard told. He came round the end of the counter, and held out his hand.

"Tarquin Talland," he said. "Hugh was my great-grandfather. And you'll be Douglas Hills's grandson." He shook Jono's hand. Firm. Dry. "I was told you'd do it properly. I was told you'd be standing outside at ten past, waiting for the quarter." He smiled. "My grandmother used to say you could always tell a Hills. They're the only people left in England who are early for a code."

He turned to Clifford, and shook his hand too, and said, "Mr Dawes. Your people speak very highly of you. Do come through. There's tea. Obviously."

He went to the door and turned the sign round from *OPEN* to *CLOSED*, and bolted it, the way, Jono thought, a very old man in the Marais had once done for Chris. Then he lifted the flap at the end of the counter and led them through a door at the back, past the drawers, into a room.

* * *

It was a back room. Of course it was. There was always a back room.

Low, panelled, a coal fire in a small iron grate, though it was October and not cold. A round table with a green baize cloth. Four chairs. A tray on the table with a brown teapot and five cups. Bookshelves. A window onto a yard with a fig tree in it.

And in the corner, by the fire, in an armchair with a high back, a woman.

She was about seventy. Small, and very thin, in a grey cardigan and grey trousers, with grey hair cut short like a boy's. And she wore glasses. Enormous round glasses, black-framed, so thick that her eyes behind them looked as if they were at the bottom of two fishbowls. She had a newspaper folded on her knee, open at the crossword, and a pencil, and she was looking at the crossword. She did not look up when they came in.

Tarquin did not introduce her. He did not look at her. He sat Jono and Clifford down at the round table, with their backs to the fire, and poured the tea, five cups, and put one on the arm of her chair without a word, and sat down himself across from them.

The woman in the corner went on doing the crossword.

Jono looked at her for a moment. He did not let himself think the name. He had read Chris's book. All of it, twice, the copy Chris had printed out for him and nobody else, the winter after he came home. He knew about a girl in Stafford with very big glasses. He knew about a line-printer banner, folded small. He knew about a woman in a grey suit at an interview in Bristol, and a job in Cheltenham in January 1982, and an entry in his own grandfather's book that said *recommended by A.*

He did not let himself think it. He looked away, at Tarquin, and put his hands flat on the green baize.

"Right," he said. "What do you want?"

* * *

What Tarquin wanted took an hour, and was, Jono would think afterwards on the train, three things, and he only told them two.

The first was the lamps.

"You understand," said Tarquin, "that we're very worried." He said it pleasantly, the way he said everything. "A town of a hundred and forty thousand people in the south-west of England has, in the

last month, become able to see, with the naked eye, which of their neighbours is competent and which is not. And who they answer to, if they have the right equipment, which I understand three of your people now do." He turned his cup on its saucer. A quarter turn. Jono watched him do it and wondered where he had learned it. "If that were to spread, Mr Hills, beyond Torbay, I don't think the government would last a fortnight. I'm not sure any government would. I'm not sure we'd have a civil service. I'm not sure we'd have a Cabinet."

"It won't spread," said Clifford. "It's the coverage. The relay. Hope's Nose to Berry Head. Nobody outside the bay can see it."

"Then the relay stays exactly where it is," said Tarquin. "On that roof. And the thing it talks to stays exactly where *it* is. In that cellar. And neither of them goes anywhere else. Ever." He smiled. "That's not a request, by the way. I'm told to say it pleasantly, but it's not a request."

Jono looked at Clifford. Clifford nodded. Slowly.

"Second," said Tarquin.

* * *

The second was Eden.

"They want to go," said Tarquin.

Jono sat very still.

"Not all of them. Not everywhere. But Torbay." Tarquin set his cup down. "They've had a bad year. The forge. The film. The planning committee laughed out of its own chamber on the internet. Four million views. A man of theirs in the Town Hall who can't walk down the street without three hundred people looking at the lamp over his head. Their accountant has gone very quiet. Their hotel man has stopped answering his phone on Sundays." He shrugged. "And now this. The lamps. They can't operate in a place

where people can see who they answer to. Nobody can. So they've let it be known, through people who know people in Jersey, that they would like to leave Torbay. Peacefully. Quietly. Sell up, close down, go. In return for which..."

"In return for which," said Jono, "nobody publishes anything."

Tarquin looked at him.

"There's a book," said Jono. "Green cloth. Foolscap. You know about it. You know about it because you know about everything." He did not take his hands off the baize. "Every name in the Town Hall who took their money. Since 2014. In an accountant's handwriting. And you want it not to come out."

"I want," said Tarquin carefully, "what's best for the bay. A quiet exit. No trials. No front pages. The names in that book can be dealt with. Quietly. Over time. Early retirements. Health reasons. A few resignations." He spread his hands. "That's how these things are done, Mr Hills. You were a policeman. You know that's how these things are done."

"I was a policeman for twenty-five years," said Jono. "I know exactly how these things are done. They're retired with a ceremony. Or they're promoted. Or, more often, they simply go on." He looked at Tarquin across the green baize. "There's a man in that book who was a detective inspector at the top of Berry Head in 1992. He said *kids*. He's the Mayor now. He's got a chain. Under your quiet exit, he keeps it."

Tarquin did not say anything for a moment.

"Yes," he said. "Under the agreement, he would keep it. For now."

"And the rest?"

"For now."

Jono sat back in his chair.

In the corner, by the fire, the woman in the enormous glasses had stopped writing in her crossword. She had not looked up. The pencil was resting on the paper, not moving.

* * *

The third thing Tarquin wanted, he did not ask for. Jono saw him decide not to. He saw it come up behind the pale grey eyes, twice, in the hour, and go back down. It was in the way Tarquin looked at Clifford when Clifford said *the cellar*, and at Jono when Jono said *we*. A young man. A face. A name nobody could find on any record anywhere in the world.

Tarquin did not ask. Jono thought, on the train, that it was the most intelligent thing anybody had done all afternoon.

At ten past four Tarquin stood up.

"I'll tell them you'll consider it," he said. "Your people. Mr Harvey. The others. That's all I need today." He held out his hand again. "It's been an honour, Mr Hills. Truly. My grandmother used to tell me about your great-great-grandfather. She met him once, when she was a girl, at a funeral in Paignton. She said he laughed at a message about a coil of rope." He smiled. "I've always wanted to know what the message was."

"So have I," said Jono.

They went to the door of the back room.

* * *

"How is he?"

Jono stopped.

It was the woman in the corner. She had not moved. She was sitting in the high-backed armchair by the fire with the crossword on her knee and the pencil in her hand, and her cup of tea untouched on the arm of the chair, and she was looking at Jono. Through the

enormous glasses. Her eyes swimming behind them, very large, very steady.

Her voice was dry. A little hoarse. A voice that had spent a long time in rooms with machines in them, Jono thought, and not much time talking.

He did not ask who she meant.

He stood in the doorway of the back room in Pimlico and thought about how to answer, and found that it mattered to him very much to get it right. To say it properly. The way you write things down: the date, the time, the weather. What you saw. Not what you felt.

"He's sixty-six," he said. "He had a stroke in 2022. His left hand's bad. He plays guitar in a pub in Paignton on Saturday nights, in a band, and he's not very good, and he doesn't mind. He lives with his mother, who's ninety-three. He's built an archive of everything that's ever happened in Torbay, out of his dad's old videotapes. He works in a cellar. He drinks too much tea." He paused. "There's a woman in Brixham. They've been not quite together for ten years. He goes and looks at the boats with her on Sundays."

The woman in the glasses did not say anything.

"A month ago," said Jono, "he saw his own number in a shop window. One of the lamps. And he laughed. Out loud, in the street. First time in months." He looked at her. "That's how he is."

She looked at him for a long time through the glasses.

Then something happened at the corner of her mouth. Not a smile. Smaller than a smile. The thing that happens in a face that has not smiled very often and has forgotten quite how, and remembers, for a second.

She looked down at the crossword.

"Thank you," she said.

* * *

Tarquin unbolted the shop door. The bell rang. Warwick Way outside, grey and ordinary, a bus going past, a woman with a dog.

Clifford went out first. Jono followed. He had one foot on the step.

"Mr Hills."

He turned round.

She was standing in the doorway at the back of the shop, at the end of the long dark counter, between the drawers with their brass labels. Small and grey and very thin, with her hand on the door frame. She had come out of the back room. Jono had not heard her get up.

"Tell him," she said, "it's not nothing."

Jono stood on the step of the tea shop in Pimlico.

He did not ask what it meant. He did not need to. He had read it, in Chris's book, at his kitchen table in Preston, the winter after Chris came home. A banner, off a line printer, in a machine room in Stafford at dawn in 1981. Three words, each letter as tall as a forearm. Folded small. In a shoebox. On a ship.

IT'S NOT NOTHING.

"I'll tell him," said Jono.

She nodded, once. Then she turned and went back into the back room, and the door closed behind her, and Tarquin, at the counter, smiled at Jono very slightly, and turned the sign round again from *CLOSED* to *OPEN*.

* * *

On the train, at Reading, Clifford said, "You know who that was."

"Yes."

"You going to tell me?"

"No," said Jono.

Clifford looked out of the window at Berkshire going by for a while.

"She decoded it," he said. "The burst. *Zider at Grans.* She's the one who said *give it to the Torbay people*." He was quiet. "I never met her. They just said an old lady at Cheltenham. Been there since the eighties." He looked at Jono. "She wasn't there for Tarquin, was she. She wasn't there for the deal."

"No," said Jono.

"She was there to ask that question."

Jono took out his pocketbook. He wrote the date, the time, the place. He wrote *Quarter of Darjeeling. Too dear*, and that Tarquin had laughed. He wrote down what Tarquin wanted: the relay stays, the stone stays, Eden goes, the book stays shut, the names stay in post *for now*. He underlined nothing.

Then he wrote: *Lady in the corner. Grey. Big round glasses. A crossword. Said nothing for an hour. Then two things.*

How is he?

Tell him it's not nothing.

He looked at it for a long time, while the train went on west, towards Taunton, and the Blackdowns, and the red earth, and the sea.

He would pass it on. Word for word. He had said he would. But not today. Not on a train. Not on the phone. He would wait, the

way Hills waited, until it was the right time, and the right place, and Chris was standing still.

He closed the book and put the elastic round it.

"Not nothing," said Clifford quietly, to the window, as if he were trying it out.

"No," said Jono. "It's not."

Chapter 22 – *It's Not Nothing*

Thurs. 5 Oct. 2028. Bailey's, quiz night, 8.30 p.m. A.H. came out from behind the bar with two lime cordials. Sat at Philip's table. He had already written the name. "Just Us." They came fourth. Neither of them laughed. Both of them stayed till closing.

Jono said it on the Tuesday, at the forge, a week after London, without looking up.

Chris had gone down at four, the way he did most afternoons now, to sit on the bench by the big doors and watch. He did not do anything at the forge. He could not, with the hand. He sat on the bench with a mug of tea and watched Fred and Ken and the apprentices, and the fire breathing under the bellows, and the iron going from black to red to orange to yellow-white, and the hammers coming down, and it did him more good, he had told Karen, than any physio he had ever had. *It's watching something get made*, he said. *I spent forty years watching things get unmade.*

Jono was there because the forge had a problem with its extraction fan and Jono, who had once been a policeman and was now a carer, was, for reasons nobody could explain, the only person in Paignton who could get the fan to work. He was up a stepladder by the chimney breast under the scorched ALBION stone with a screwdriver in his teeth and his arm inside a metal box, swearing very quietly at a wire.

Chris was not paying him any attention. He was watching Fred.

Fred had a bar of steel in the tongs and was drawing it out on the anvil, long and thin, turning it a quarter turn after every three

blows, the way Ken had taught him, and his face in the light of the fire had the look Chris had seen once on Ken's, at the opening, and once on Leonard Harvey's, in a photograph from 1943, in a boatyard at Galmpton, with a plane in his hand. The look of a man who is entirely inside the thing he is making.

Fred's lamp, over his head, was very bright.

"Chris," said Jono, from the top of the stepladder.

"Mm."

Jono took the screwdriver out of his teeth. He did not look down. He kept his arm in the metal box, feeling for the wire, with his face turned to the chimney breast and the scorched letters, and said, in his ordinary voice, the voice he used for weather and bus times and what Mrs Hellier had had for breakfast:

"A woman in London said to tell you it's not nothing."

* * *

Chris did not move.

The hammer came down on the anvil. Fred turned the bar, a quarter turn. The hammer came down again.

Chris sat on the bench by the big doors with his tea in his good hand and his bad hand in his lap, and looked at Fred's back, and did not see it.

He saw a fire escape.

An iron fire escape on the side of a concrete building, the computer centre at the Polytechnic in Stafford, at dawn, in March 1981. A flat field white with frost. A line of pylons going away into the grey. The motorway, a river of headlights. And the light coming, pale and slow and very large, over the Midlands. And a girl beside him, tall, thin, in a black jumper, with very short dark hair and enormous round glasses that made her eyes look as if they were at

the bottom of two fishbowls, with her arms folded, not looking at him.

It's not the sea. I know it's not. You talk about it in your sleep, you know. It's not the sea. But it's not nothing, either. Is it?

And a machine room, a week later, with the line printer clearing its throat in the corner and green-and-white fanfold paper feeding out over the back of it and folding itself on the floor. And a girl spreading it out between the cabinets, the whole length of the room. Three words, each letter as tall as his forearm, made of hundreds of small ones.

He had it still. It was in a shoebox. It had gone to sea in 2018 in a carton marked ARCHIVE 7 and come off a ship at Avonmouth eleven weeks later, and it was in the cellar under Studio Ania now, on a shelf, in a shoebox, folded small. He had not unfolded it since 1982. He had not needed to.

He had not seen her since January 1982. Since the platform at Stafford, in the snow, with her hand flat against the window of the train.

Forty-six years.

Tell him it's not nothing.

* * *

"Where?" he said.

His voice came out strange. Fred heard it, and looked round from the anvil, and then looked at Jono on the stepladder, and then, being Fred, looked back at the anvil and did not say anything.

"Pimlico," said Jono. He was still feeling for the wire. "A tea shop. Talland's. Last Tuesday. She was in the corner, in the back room, doing the crossword. She didn't say anything for an hour." A pause. Something clicked inside the metal box. "Then she asked me how you were."

"What did you tell her?"

"The truth." Jono pulled his arm out of the box, and looked at his hand, and put the screwdriver back in his teeth for a moment, and took it out again. "That you're sixty-six and you had a stroke and your hand's bad. That you play guitar in a pub on Saturdays and you're not very good and you don't mind. That you live with your mum. That you drink too much tea. That you saw your number in a shop window last month and laughed." He paused. "That there's a woman in Brixham."

Chris did not say anything for a long time.

"What did she say to that?"

"She said thank you." Jono came down a step on the ladder. "And then, when we were going, she came to the door of the shop and said to tell you. Those words. I said I would." He looked at Chris, at last, from halfway down the ladder, with the screwdriver in his hand and the scorched letters of the Albion over his head. "I've waited a week. I wanted to tell you somewhere you were sitting down."

Chris looked at him.

"You're a good man, Jono," he said.

"I'm a Hills," said Jono, and went back up the ladder.

* * *

Chris put his mug down on the bench.

He stood up. He did not decide to. He went out through the big doors of the forge into Station Square, into the October afternoon, into the light, and stood on the stones.

It was half past four. The sun was getting low over the town behind him, and the light was coming long across the square from the west, gold, the way it came in autumn. Bailey's on the far corner

with its windows lit, the first drinkers going in. The station. The barriers up at the level crossing, the bells quiet. A bus pulling out of the bus station. People going home with shopping, with children, with dogs that would not go out after dark. And the lamps, over every head, going to and fro across the square in the gold light like lanterns.

He stood in the middle of Station Square with his hands at his sides and did not move.

He stood there for a long time. People went round him. A woman with a pushchair. Two schoolboys, who looked at the old man standing still in the middle of the square with his eyes wet and nudged each other and went on. A man from the council in a high-visibility jacket, who stopped and asked him if he was all right, and Chris said yes, and the man looked at his lamp, sideways, and went away.

He was thinking about a girl on a fire escape who had looked at him and seen the sea in him and told him it was not nothing. Who had been offered a job in Cheltenham by a woman in a grey suit and had gone, in the snow, because she had done what she was for. Who had sat in a room full of machines for forty-six years, hearing faults in lines that nobody else could hear, and decoding the things that came down out of the sky, and saying, about one of them, *give it to the Torbay people*.

Who had sat in the corner of a back room in Pimlico for an hour with a crossword, and then asked how he was.

He had loved her. Ten months, in 1981. In a bedsit with a gas fire and books in piles on the floor. He had loved all of them, the six, completely, every one, and he had stopped, the way you stop, and gone on to the next, and carried them, the way Sue said you carried the ones who went. He had not thought, in years, that any of them carried him.

Tell him it's not nothing.

The barriers came down at the level crossing. The bells went. *Ding-ding-ding-ding*. The square stopped. The traffic stopped. People stopped. Chris stood in the middle of it with everybody else, waiting.

A train came through. Not the steam train. An ordinary one, two carriages, going down to Kingswear. It went past slowly, and people in its windows looked out at the square, at the lamps, at an old man standing still in the middle of it.

The barriers lifted.

Chris went home and got his car keys.

* * *

He was not supposed to drive. Not after the stroke. Not with the hand. The car was an automatic and he had had it adapted, and the doctor had said *short journeys, in daylight, if you must*, and his mother had said *over my dead body*, and Jono had said nothing and looked at him in a way that meant the same.

It was not quite dark when he set off. That was the excuse he gave himself.

He drove round the bay. Out of Paignton on the Brixham road, past Goodrington and the big hotels on the cliff, past Broadsands with its long curve of beach going grey, past Churston and the golf course, up over the hill, and down. The sun went while he was driving. It went into the sea behind him, red, the way it does in October, and when he came down the hill into Brixham the harbour lights were on, stacked up the hillside round the water, and the boats were in, and the fish market was shut, and there was nobody on the quay at all.

Except one.

* * *

She was at the railings by the fish market, at the edge of the quay, looking down at the boats. In a big jumper with the sleeves rolled up four times. Grey hair, short, no ribbon. Hands in the pockets of her jeans. The way she had stood on the platform at Torquay ten years ago, the afternoon he came home. The way she had stood, he supposed, every evening since Robbie died, at the railings by the fish market, looking at the boats coming in.

Her lamp, over her grey head, in the harbour lights, was almost white.

He parked by the harbour master's office. He got out. He walked across the quay.

She heard him. She did not turn round. She knew his walk. She had known it since 1978, across a canteen at Fleet House.

He came and stood beside her at the railings. Not touching. A foot apart. He put his good hand on the cold iron of the rail.

She did not say anything.

He did not say anything either.

* * *

They stood there for an hour.

The boats moved on the water below them, very slightly, the way boats move in a harbour at night, nudging their fenders, creaking. The lights of the town lay on the black water in long broken lines. Somewhere a halyard was tapping against a mast, steady, like a clock. A gull on the roof of the fish market put its head under its wing. The tide came in. You could see it if you watched the green weed on the harbour steps: one step, then another, the black water coming up and covering it.

Up behind them, on the hill, the houses went dark one by one.

Out at the end of everything, past the breakwater, past the harbour mouth, out on the head, the lighthouse went round. The long white arm came out over the sea, and round, and went on. Round, and light, and dark. Round, and light, and dark.

She was counting it. He knew she was. He could see her lips, very slightly, in the harbour lights.

He counted it too.

He did not tell her about the woman in the tea shop in Pimlico. He did not tell her about a fire escape in Stafford, or a banner on a machine-room floor. He did not tell her about a young man in a back room with his face in a woman's hands, because he did not know about that, and never would. He did not tell her about a ledger, or a Mayor, or a peace that was going to be signed on Friday. He did not tell her anything.

She did not ask.

She had never asked. In fifty years she had never once asked him a question she thought he did not want to answer. He had loved her for that at sixteen and not known it. He knew it now.

Round, and light, and dark.

At some point in the hour, he did not know when, her hand came out of the pocket of her jeans and came to rest on the cold iron railing beside his. Not touching. An inch away. Their two hands on the rail, his good one and hers, in the light from the harbour, with an inch of cold iron between them.

They left them there.

* * *

At half past seven she said, without turning her head, "You drove."

"Yes."

"You're not supposed to drive."

"No."

She was quiet for a while.

"I'll drive you back," she said. "In the bathtub. You can get yours tomorrow."

"All right."

Neither of them moved. The lighthouse went round.

"Chris," said Karen.

"Mm."

"Whatever it was." She was looking at the boats. "That made you drive over here in the dark with your bad hand to stand on a quay and not say anything for an hour." She paused. "It's all right. You don't have to tell me."

He looked at her. Her face in the harbour lights, sixty-seven, weathered, freckled still, the grey-green eyes that had looked straight at him across a canteen table at ten past ten in the morning in 1978 and not looked away.

"It's not nothing," he said.

She turned her head then, and looked at him. For a long moment. As if she were reading something written very small.

"No," said Karen Tozer. "I didn't think it was."

She took her hand off the rail, and put it back in her pocket, and turned, and walked towards the little blue car by the fish market. He followed her.

Behind them, out on the head, the lighthouse went on counting by itself.

Chapter 23 – *The Pavilion*

Wed. 11 Oct. 2028. Paignton Pavilion, 7 p.m. Launch. Capacity 1,200. Inside: about 1,500. Outside: don't know. One sheet of paper in my inside pocket, folded in four. Did not take it out. K.T. at the back, by the doors, in her coat. Left before the end.

The Pavilion had been open for nine weeks and it was the first new public building in Paignton that anybody under sixty could remember being finished on time.

It stood on the Green, by the pier, where the old bandstand had been, a long low hall of timber and glass with a roof like an upturned boat, so that from the sea it looked, Richard said, like something that had been washed up and decided to stay. Richard had not designed it. He had wanted to. He had been asked, in 2027, and had said he was too old and too busy and too angry, and had then spent four months telling the young architects from Bristol who did design it exactly what they were doing wrong, and they had listened to about half of it, and it was, he said grudgingly, the best half.

Tan had paid for it. Vicky had built it. It had come in on the day it was promised, at the price it was promised, in eleven months, and the council had sent a letter about the drainage on the Monday after it opened, and Vicky had put it in a file.

Jono stood in the wings at a quarter to seven, behind a black curtain, and looked out through the gap at twelve hundred seats, and fifteen hundred people.

* * *

He had not expected this.

He had stood on a bollard in Station Square in March 2027 with Richard's battery amplifier and said he was going to stand for Parliament, and five thousand people had made a sound he had never forgotten. That was eighteen months ago. Since then there had been the gun, and the stone, and the roof, and the lamps, and London. There had not been a campaign. There had been a carer, doing his calls, with a pocketbook.

The election would be next year. Spring, people said. Nobody knew. The government had a majority and no reason to go early and every reason to go late. There was time.

But a week ago Vicky had come to the forge and said, *if you're going to do it, do it now. Before Friday. Before they sign anything. Let the town hear you before it hears them.* And Chris had said, from the bench, *she's right*, and Jono had looked at the two of them and thought about the folded page in his pocketbook and said yes.

So here he was. In a black curtain, in his one good suit, which he had last worn to Claire's father's funeral in 2006, and which was tight across the shoulders now because he lifted people for a living. With his lanyard in his pocket, because he had come straight from a call. With a sheet of paper in his inside pocket, folded in four.

It was a photocopy. One page. Keith had made it, on the machine in the cellar, on Monday night, and given it to him without a word.

Page forty-one of a green ledger. Philip Carew's small, neat, terrible capitals. Twelve lines. A date in each, a sum, a company in Jersey, a purpose. *Planning, Totnes Road site. Committee, Q3. Campaign.* And down the left-hand side, in the column for the name, twelve times, the same initials.

T.R.

Robinson. As superintendent, and as candidate, and as Mayor.

Jono had not taken it out since Monday. He had not shown it to anybody. He had felt it in his pocket all day, through two baths and a bedtime and a woman in Goodrington who thought he was her son, the way you feel a stone in your shoe.

He was not going to use it. He knew that. He had known it since London, since a pleasant young man across a green baize table had said *for now*. Rage had not decided what to do about Friday. Until it had, the page stayed folded.

But he had brought it.

He did not know why. That was not true. He knew exactly why.

* * *

Vicky came up beside him in the wings.

"Fifteen hundred," she said. "They've opened the side doors so the ones on the Green can hear. There are people on the pier." She looked at him. "There's a lot of anger out there, Jono."

"I know."

"No. I mean it." She looked out through the gap in the curtain, the way she looked at a spreadsheet when the numbers were wrong. "Something's got out. About Friday. Somebody's been talking. There's a rumour going round that Eden's leaving and making a deal, and that the deal is that everybody in the Town Hall stays where they are." She paused. "And a second rumour. That there's a book."

Jono did not say anything.

"Annie didn't tell anybody," said Vicky. "Philip didn't. I've asked." She looked at him. "But somebody's been talking. And they're angry. They've had five weeks of looking at the lamps over the heads of the people who run this town, Jono. They know.

They've seen it. And now they think they're going to be told to forget it."

Jono looked out through the curtain.

Fifteen hundred people. And over every head, a lamp. He could see them from the wings. Amber, steady, going to and fro as people moved in their seats. A hall full of lights, like the switchboard on the fifth floor at Fleet House in Chris's book, every lamp lit, every line waiting for somebody to answer.

And the sound. Not loud. A sort of low hum under everything. The sound of fifteen hundred people who had been told something for forty years and had just seen, with their own eyes, that it was not true.

* * *

Richard introduced him. Richard said four sentences and sat down. Then Jono walked out onto the stage.

The noise hit him like weather.

He had not expected it. He had stood in front of crowds before. He had stood at the edge of them in uniform for twenty-five years. He had stood on a bollard. He had never stood in front of fifteen hundred people who rose to their feet when he walked out, all together, the way the crowd at the Kallang rose in Chris's book when Singapore scored, the noise coming up out of the floor and through the soles of his shoes and into his chest.

He stood at the front of the stage in his tight suit and let it go on until it stopped.

Then he spoke.

He did not have notes. He had never had notes. He said what he had said on the bollard in March 2027, and on doorsteps since, and in the cellar, and on the roof of the monastery, though he had not said it out loud there. One question. He asked it again.

"Do you want people in charge who can finish things? Or don't you?"

The noise again. He waited.

"A year and a half ago," he said, "I asked you that, and you had to take my word for it. You had to take anybody's word for it. Who was any good. Who could do the job. Who was just sitting in a chair, saying *remains a priority*, for forty years." He looked out at the lamps. "You don't have to take anybody's word now. You can see."

The hall went very quiet.

"So here's what I'm going to do," said Jono. "When the election comes. I'm going to stand in Station Square. On a Saturday. Daylight. For a whole day. And anybody who wants to can come and look at me." He paused. "And I'm going to ask everybody else who stands to do the same. Every party. Every candidate. Councillors. The Mayor. Stand in the square for a day, in daylight, and let the town look."

He had not planned to say it. It came out of him the way Chris's songs had come out of him in Highbury, like water from a pipe.

The hall went up.

* * *

It was at about twenty past seven that it turned.

He did not see where it started. Afterwards, writing it down, he thought it had started near the back on the left, by the side doors, where the people from the Green were pressed in. A man's voice. One voice, shouting. He did not hear the words at first. Then he did.

"*What about the book?*"

The hall went still.

"*There's a book!*" The voice again. A big man near the side doors, in a work jacket, with a lamp over his head so bright it lit the people around him. "*Everybody knows there's a book! With the names in! Who took the money! Read the book, Jono!*"

And then another voice, from the other side. A woman. "*They're doing a deal! They're leaving and the rest stay! Is it true?*"

And another. And another. And then the whole hall, not shouting words now, just making the sound, the low sound, rising, the sound Jono had heard once before in his life, outside a pub on Union Street in 1994 on a Saturday night just before the first bottle went.

He stood at the front of the stage with his hands at his sides.

He could feel the page in his inside pocket. Folded in four. Page forty-one. Twelve lines. *T.R.*

He could take it out. He could unfold it, here, now, and hold it up, and read it out loud into the microphone, twelve lines, and fifteen hundred people would hear it, and it would be on the internet by eight o'clock, and by nine the Mayor of Devon and Torbay would be finished, and the deal would be finished, and whatever Rage was going to decide on Friday would be decided for it, here, by a crowd, in a pavilion that looked like a boat.

He thought about a young man of nineteen on the top of Berry Head in 1992, with a pocketbook, being told *you can put that away now*.

He did not take it out.

* * *

"No," he said.

The microphone caught it. The hall heard it. It went quiet again, not all at once, in waves, from the front to the back.

"No," said Jono. "Not tonight. Not like this."

The big man at the side doors shouted something. Jono did not hear what.

"I know there's a book," said Jono. "I'm not going to stand here and tell you there isn't. I was a policeman for twenty-five years and I never once lied to a crowd and I'm not going to start now." He looked out at the lamps. "There's a book. And when it's read, it'll be read properly. In a room. In daylight. With every name and every date and every sum, in order, the way it was written. Not shouted. Not in a hall. Not on a phone at eight o'clock."

"*When?*" A woman's voice, near the front.

"When it's time," said Jono.

He heard how it sounded. He heard it go out over the hall and land, and he heard it land badly. *When it's time*. Every man in a suit who had ever stood in front of this town and said *remains a priority* had said that. He saw it in their faces. He saw it in the lamps, which did not dim, which did not change, but over which, somehow, the faces had changed.

"I'm not asking you to wait forty years," he said. "I'm asking you to wait a week."

The big man at the side doors turned round and walked out.

Not in anger. Not slamming anything. He just turned, and went out through the side doors onto the Green, into the dark, and the people round him watched him go, and some of them went with him. Not many. Twenty. Thirty. Out through the side doors into the dark, towards the town.

Towards Station Square.

* * *

Jono finished. He said the rest of it. He said what he had come to say about the forge and the photonics firm and the bus depot site and Torbay Road. He said it well. Fifteen hundred people, most of them, stood up again at the end and made the noise again, and it was real, and it was for him.

But he had seen thirty people go out of the side doors into the dark. And he had seen, when he looked for her, at the very back of the hall, by the main doors, a woman in a coat.

Standing. Not sitting. She had not come to sit. She had come to stand at the back, by the doors, where you could leave.

Grey hair, short. Hands in her coat pockets. Her lamp, over her head, at the very back of the hall, almost white, like a lighthouse at the end of everything.

Karen.

He had not known she was coming. Nobody had. Chris had not said. Chris did not know, Jono thought; Chris was in the front row with Richard and Vicky, and had not turned round once.

Karen had been looking at the stage. At Jono. With her grey-green eyes, steady, the way she had looked at Chris across a canteen table in 1978. And when the big man shouted *read the book*, and the hall began to make the sound, Jono had seen her look away from the stage. Look round. At the people standing up. At the side doors. At the dark outside.

And when the thirty went out, she went too.

Not with them. Not after them. Out of the main doors at the back, on her own, quietly, with her hands in her coat pockets, the way she had once walked off a platform at Torquay in 1980 so as not to watch a train go.

* * *

He found her afterwards. He did not know why he looked. It was half past eight and the hall was emptying and Vicky was talking to the press and Chris was being hugged by a woman from the Lightwave and Jono went out of the main doors onto the Green in his tight suit, into the cold, and looked along the sea front, and there was a little blue Fiesta parked by the pier with its lights off and somebody sitting in it.

He went and knocked on the window.

She wound it down.

"You didn't stay," he said.

"No."

"Why not?"

Karen looked at him through the open window, in the light from the pier.

"Because I've seen that before," she said. "That sound. When the man shouted." She looked past him, along the sea front, towards the town, towards the station, towards the square. "Brixham. 1985. The miners' wives came down to the harbour to collect for the strike, and some men from the boats didn't like it, and somebody shouted, and the whole quay made that sound." She was quiet a moment. "Our Kevin was in it. He came home with blood on his hands and sat at Mum's kitchen table and didn't say anything for two days."

Jono did not say anything.

"You did right," said Karen. "Not reading it. I want you to know I thought that. You did right." She put her hands on the wheel. "But they're not going home, Jono. Those ones that went out the side. They're not going home."

"No," said Jono.

"Will you tell him?"

He knew who she meant.

"Tell him what?"

"That I was there." She did not look at him. "That I came. And stood at the back. And left."

Jono looked at her for a long time.

"Do you want me to?"

Karen thought about it. The lights of the pier on the water behind her. The sound of the sea on the sand, coming in.

"No," she said. "Not yet."

She wound the window up. She started the car. She pulled out from the pier and drove away along the sea front, towards Goodrington, towards the Brixham road, towards the head, and Jono stood on the Green in his tight suit and watched her tail lights go.

Then he took out his pocketbook, and wrote it down.

And then, because his hand had gone there by itself, he took out the other thing. The sheet of paper. Folded in four. He did not unfold it. He held it in his hand on the Green in the cold, and looked along the sea front the other way, inland, towards the station, where there was, he thought, a faint orange light over the roofs that had not been there an hour ago.

He put it back in his pocket.

When it's time, he had said.

He did not know, standing there, how short a time it was going to be.

Chapter 24 – *The Square Burns*

Wed. 11 Oct. 2028. Station Square, Paignton.

The orange light over the roofs was a bin.

Jono saw that when he came up Torbay Road from the sea front at a quarter to nine, half running, in his tight suit, with his tie in his pocket. A big green council bin on wheels, at the corner of the square by the bus shelter, on its side, burning. Black smoke going up straight in the still air, and the flames inside it orange and lazy, and a ring of people round it, forty or fifty, standing, watching it burn the way you watch a bonfire on the fifth of November, with their hands in their pockets and their faces lit.

That was all. A bin. People.

He stopped at the top of Torbay Road with his chest going and looked at it, and thought: *All right. All right. It's a bin.*

Then he looked at the lamps.

* * *

He had got used to them. Everybody had. Five weeks. You stopped seeing them, almost, the way you stopped seeing the lights on in the houses along a street at night. You only noticed when one was missing.

Three were missing.

At the front of the ring round the bin. Three men. Young, in dark hooded tops with the hoods up, in dark trousers, in good trainers. Standing very close to the fire, closer than anybody else. One of them had a bottle in his hand. Not drinking from it. Holding it by the neck, down by his leg.

Over the heads of every other person in that ring, a lamp. Amber, steady, lit by the fire from below.

Over those three, nothing. Clear air. The smoke going up through it.

Jono knew what that meant. He had worked it out on the station platform in September, watching a family get off a train. *About six hours in the bay before they see it.* Before it sees them.

Those three had not been in Torbay six hours.

They had come in on a train, or in a car, that afternoon, from somewhere else. While fifteen hundred people sat in a pavilion by the pier. While a man shouted *read the book* and thirty people walked out of the side doors into the dark towards the square, angry, wanting somebody to tell them what to do with it.

And somebody had been waiting in the square to tell them.

* * *

He got his phone out and rang Chris. Chris did not answer. He rang Clifford. Engaged. He rang 999 and gave his name and said he was an ex-police officer and that there was a crowd in Station Square in Paignton and a fire and three males not local with what looked like an accelerant, and the woman on the other end said a unit was on its way, and he said *how long*, and she said she could not say.

He put the phone away.

The man with the bottle had lifted it. Jono saw him do it. Saw him pull something out of his pocket, a rag, and stuff it into the neck. Saw one of the other two flick a lighter.

"No," said Jono. Out loud. To nobody. Fifty yards away. "No, son, don't—"

The bottle went up in a long, lazy, turning arc, end over end, with its tail of fire, over the heads of the crowd, over the bus shelter, and came down on the canopy over the front of Paignton station.

* * *

The station had stood on that side of the square since 1859.

Not the building. The building was newer, a long low thing of brick and glass from the eighties, with a ticket office and a café and a newsagent, and behind it the platforms under their canopies. But the station had stood there since the railway came, since before there were trams, since before Bailey's. It was where Holmes had come out and crossed the square to the window where Edward sat. It was where Ania had got off the four o'clock with no ticket. It was where Jono, at nineteen, had gone past every morning in his uniform on the way to the police station, with a pocketbook in his tunic and an undeveloped film in a tin at home.

The bottle burst on the canopy roof. A soft heavy sound, *whump*, like a duvet dropped on a floor. And then fire, running down the slope of the canopy in a sheet, bright, into the gutter, and dripping, and catching on the timber fascia along the front of the building, the old painted boards that said *PAIGNTON* in cream letters on maroon.

The crowd made the sound.

The one from the Pavilion. Rising. Not a cheer. Something older. And then everybody was moving at once, some towards the fire and some away, and two more bottles went up from the front of the ring, end over end, one onto the station and one onto the roof of the council's Town Centre Initiative office on the corner of Torbay Road, the one with the ribbon and the banner, *WORKING FOR YOUR FUTURE*.

And then somebody threw a brick through a window. Jono never saw who.

* * *

He would not be able to say, afterwards, how long it went on. He would try. He would sit at his kitchen table in Preston at four in

the morning with his pocketbook open and try to put it in order, the way you were supposed to, the way Jack had, the way Johnny had, and it would not go in order. It came in pieces. The way Wendy said she remembered the war.

The station canopy burning end to end, the cream letters going black one by one. *P-A-I-G*. The heat on his face from across the square.

A boy of about sixteen standing on top of the bus shelter waving a council traffic cone over his head and screaming something Jono could not hear.

The windows of the Town Centre Initiative office going, one after the other, and inside, through the smoke, the banner from the opening in 2026 catching, *WORKING FOR*, and curling, and falling.

Police. One car, then three, then a van, lights going round, blue on the smoke. A line of officers in yellow coming across from the station car park with shields. Not enough. Nowhere near enough. Jono saw the sergeant from Bailey's, the calm woman with the Plymouth voice, at the end of the line, with her helmet on, shouting into her radio.

The fire engines, two, from Paignton and Torquay, pushing through the crowd with their sirens going, and the crowd not wanting to let them through, and then letting them.

Fred.

Fred in the big doors of the forge on the far side of the square, in his leather apron, with a fire hose. A real one. The forge's own, from the wall, that Ken had made him learn to use in his first week. Fred standing in the doors of the forge with his legs apart and the hose in both hands and the apprentices behind him, all eighteen, in a line, and Biscuit behind them, barking, high and furious, the first time any dog in Paignton had barked after dark for six weeks. And

anybody who came within twenty yards of the forge with anything in their hand getting the full force of the hose in the chest. Fred's lamp blazing over his head like a headlight.

Bailey's. The windows of the public bar going, one, two. Annie inside, in the doorway, with her arms folded, not moving, with the glass on the floor round her feet. And then Tan's barman, the boy of twenty, beside her. And then four more of the staff. Standing in the doorway. Not doing anything. Just standing there, with their lamps on, being looked at. And the crowd, coming towards Bailey's with a brick, seeing them, and the lamps, and stopping.

Chris.

Chris on the corner of Torbay Road by the zebra crossing, with his phone held up. Not at the fire. At the crowd. Turning slowly, the way he had on the night the Albion burned. Filming the faces. The way he always had.

And the three young men with no lamps over their heads, moving through all of it, fast, low, the way the gunman had moved through Bailey's in April. Not throwing anything any more. Their work was done. Going towards the station. Towards the car park behind it. Towards the dark.

* * *

Jono went after them.

He did not decide to. His body did it, the way it had at Bailey's. Through the crowd, sideways, *excuse me*, like going down a ward at night. Past the bus shelter with the boy on top of it. Past the line of police. Round the side of the station building, where the heat was so bad he had to put his arm over his face, along the wall, towards the gap between the station and the old goods shed where the path went through to the car park.

The three young men had gone through the gap. He saw the last of them go. A dark hood, a pair of good trainers, gone.

Jono went through the gap after them.

And stopped.

* * *

The car park behind the station was dark. The lamps along its edge were out, or had been put out. The smoke from the station was coming over the roof and down into it, thick, grey, lit orange from underneath by the fire on the other side, so that the whole car park was full of it, like fog, like the mist that lay in the valleys in Jack's book on the morning they went up Hound Tor.

The three young men were gone.

But there was somebody standing in the smoke.

Ten yards from him. By the back wall of the station building, by a door. A steel fire door, standing open, with the dark of the station behind it, and the red glow of the fire coming through from the far end. Somebody had come out of it. A woman. Standing just outside it in the smoke, with her back to him, looking at her phone.

Fair hair. A good grey coat.

Jono stood very still.

* * *

He had seen her once before.

Not in life. In a photograph. Frame twenty-three of a roll of film he had taken out of a camera in the gorse on Berry Head in April 1992 and kept in a sandwich bag in a tin box for sixteen years, and driven to Exeter in 2008, and sat in a car park for an hour looking at. A woman at a fence post, caught by a flash, turning, with her fair hair across her face and her eyes wide open. Surprised.

And once again. In a photograph from Johor, on Chris's laptop. In a glass box above a football pitch. Laughing. With her hand on the arm of a grey man with an ordinary face.

And once more. Not a photograph. On the fourteenth of October 2018, at ten past four in the afternoon, from the window of the public bar of the old Bailey's, which was a forge now, on the other side of this building. A woman off the four o'clock from Newton Abbot, crossing Station Square towards the old hotel. About forty. Fair. Good grey coat. Same face as the film.

He had written two words under that, ten years ago. He had not written anything under them since.

Case open.

She was ten yards away. In the smoke. By a fire door.

She had not seen him.

* * *

He was fifty-five. He lifted people out of baths for a living. He had a grip like a vice.

He crossed the ten yards in the smoke without a sound, the way you cross a ward at night, and he had her wrist before she turned round.

Her right wrist. The one with the phone in it. He closed his hand round it, hard, and turned it, the way they had taught him at Middlemoor in 1991, and the phone went down onto the tarmac and skidded away into the dark, and he put his other forearm across her shoulders and turned her and put her back against the wall of the station, beside the open fire door, and held her there.

She did not fight.

That was the first thing. She did not fight. She did not do the fast thing the gunman had done, the turn from the hips. She went where he put her. Her back against the brick. His hand on her wrist and his arm across her collarbone. Her face a foot from his, in the smoke, lit orange from the fire through the door beside them.

Her face.

He had never seen it this close. He had never seen it anywhere but in a photograph. It was the face from the film. It was the face from Johor. It was about forty. Fair, and very calm, with grey eyes, with a smile at the corner of the mouth that went all the way up to the eyes and stopped there. Not one line on it that had not been there in 1992.

Over her head, her lamp. Bright. Very bright. Brighter than his. Brighter than anybody's he had ever seen except Mrs Hellier's. White-gold, steady, burning in the smoke.

"Karina Petrick," said Jono.

His voice did not shake. He was proud of that, afterwards. It was the only thing about that night he was proud of.

"I've been looking for you since 1992."

* * *

She looked at him.

For a long time. The fire roaring through the door beside them. The sirens. The crowd on the other side of the building, the sound it made. The smoke going over.

She looked at his face the way Chris looked at faces. The way Keith looked at them. Checking. And then something happened in her face that he did not expect. It softened. Not much. A little. The way a face softens when it sees somebody it has known for a long time, from a long way off, and never spoken to.

"You were nineteen," said Karina Petrick.

Her voice was low and pleasant and very clear. An English that was too perfect.

"On the rock. At the bottom of the cliff. With your coat over her." She did not look away. "I was at the top. In the gorse. I

watched you sit down beside her and take out a little black book and start to write. Your hands were shaking. You wrote the first line twice." She paused. "I have thought about you, Jono Hills. For thirty-six years. The boy who sat down and wrote it down."

Jono did not move.

He had her. His hand on her wrist. His arm across her. The wall at her back. Ten yards from the car park, fifty from a line of police with shields. All he had to do was shout.

He opened his mouth to shout.

"Jono."

* * *

It came from behind him. Out of the smoke.

Every word the same length.

He did not turn round. He did not need to. He had heard that voice all his life. At a christening in a pew in Preston, through a knitted hat. At Johnny's funeral. At Grandad Douglas's. On a stage in Bailey's on the night of the gun, setting words down in the air. On top of Haytor, three days ago, at dawn, not speaking at all.

"Not her," said Ania. "Not yet."

* * *

Jono stood in the smoke behind Paignton station with his hand on Karina Petrick's wrist and his arm across her collarbone and the fire roaring through the open door beside them, and did not move.

Not her. Not yet.

He knew it. Of course he knew it. He had read it in Wendy's book. In Johnny's account, written down in the back room at Widecombe Cot in 1965 for a girl of thirty with a pen, about a night in July 1943, in the tunnels under Torquay, in an air raid. A woman in a good grey coat with something small and dark at her throat,

coming out of a fire door into a garage yard. And Johnny Hills the wrong side of an iron door, and Ania beside him. And Johnny saying afterwards, *you let her go*. And Ania saying.

Not her. Not yet.

Ingrid. Karina's grandmother. Eighty-five years ago. Out of a fire door, into the dark, and let go.

And now this. Her granddaughter. Another fire door. Another Hills.

He thought, with great clarity, standing there: *I could hold on.* He thought: *I've waited thirty-six years. I've given up a marriage and a career for this face. There's a line of police fifty yards away. I could shout, and they'd come, and she'd be in a cell by midnight, and I'd write it down, Case closed, and go home and sleep for the first time since 1992.*

He thought: *Ania has never once, in a hundred and thirty-three years, been wrong about* not yet.

He thought about Basil. On a stand in Bedok, looking up three rows. On a hospital chair in Singapore, holding an old man's hand.

He thought about Grandad Douglas, in Pimlico, with the light behind him. *The girl, we don't know about.*

He let go.

* * *

He took his hand off her wrist. He took his arm off her collarbone. He stepped back. One step. Into the smoke.

Karina Petrick stood against the wall of the station with her back to the brick and looked at him. Then past him. At the woman in grey standing in the smoke behind him, very straight, with her hands at her sides, whom he did not turn round to see.

The two of them looked at each other for a long time. Across him. Over his shoulder.

Jono would never know what passed between them. He did not see Ania's face. He saw only Karina's. And on it, for a moment, in the firelight, something he had seen once in his life before, on Chris's face in the cellar under Studio Ania in April, when a young man on the bottom stair said the first line of a song nobody had ever heard. The face of somebody being handed back a thing they had stopped hoping for.

Then Karina bent, and picked up her phone from the tarmac where it had skidded, and put it in her coat pocket.

She looked at Jono one more time.

"Thank you," she said.

Not to him. He understood that afterwards. Not to him.

And she turned and walked away across the dark car park behind Paignton station, into the smoke, unhurried, with her hands in the pockets of her good grey coat, and the smoke closed behind her, and she was gone.

* * *

When he turned round, Ania was not there either.

There was smoke, and the open fire door with the red glow coming through it, and the wall, and the car park, and the sound of the crowd from the other side of the building, and sirens, and somewhere a long way off, over the roofs, a dog barking. Biscuit. Still barking. At the forge. In the dark.

Jono stood behind the burning station in his one good suit with his hands at his sides.

Then he went back round the side of the building, through the gap, into the square, into the heat and the light and the noise, and

found Chris on the corner by the zebra crossing still filming, and stood beside him, and did not say anything, and Chris looked at his face and did not ask.

The station burned until two in the morning. The canopy came down at a quarter to one, all of it, with a long tearing roar, and the cream letters with it. The Town Centre Initiative office burned out. Four other shops on the corner of Torbay Road. Bailey's lost every window on the ground floor and nothing else. The forge did not lose a single tile.

Nobody was killed. Eleven people were taken to hospital. Twenty-three were arrested. None of them had come from outside the bay. The three young men with no lamps over their heads were never found.

* * *

At four in the morning Jono sat at his kitchen table in Preston with the pocketbook open in front of him.

He wrote the date.

He wrote the place.

Then he sat with the pencil over the page until it got light, and did not write anything else at all.

It was the first time since a rock at the bottom of Berry Head in 1992 that he had sat down to write a thing and could not. Not because he did not know what had happened. Because he did. And because the only true thing he could have put under it was a thing no Hills had ever written in a hundred and thirty-three years of pocketbooks.

I let her go.

He left the rest of the page blank.

Chapter 25 – *The Agreement*

Fri. 13 Oct. 2028. Bailey's, back room, boards over the windows, 11.00 a.m. Signed. Mrs Eden for them. Mr Talland as witness. C.H. for Rage. Champagne at one. Everybody drank it except Rani, who held hers and watched the door.

Nobody had died.

That was what Chris kept coming back to, on the Thursday, walking through Station Square in the rain with the smoke still coming off the station in thin grey threads and the firemen damping down and the police tape across everything. Nobody had died. Eleven in hospital. Twenty-three arrested. A station gone, and a council office, and four shops on the corner, and every window on the ground floor of Bailey's. But nobody had died.

He had stood on the corner by the zebra crossing for five hours on Wednesday night filming the faces, and he had seen how close it was. A boy on the roof of the bus shelter, nearly falling. A woman knocked down in the crush by the taxi rank and pulled up by a stranger. A man with a brick in his hand ten yards from the doorway of Bailey's, where Annie was standing with her arms folded, and stopping, because of the lamps.

Next time somebody would die. He knew it the way you know weather.

The whole town knew it. That was the thing, on Thursday. He walked through Paignton in the rain and he could feel it. The fear. Not of Eden. Not of Rage. Of themselves. Of the sound fifteen hundred people had made in a pavilion by the pier, and the thing it had turned into an hour later in the square. Of what they had found they could do, if somebody gave them a bottle and a reason.

On Thursday afternoon Tarquin Talland rang from London.

"They'll sign tomorrow," he said. "If you will."

* * *

They signed in the back room at Bailey's at eleven o'clock on Friday morning, with plywood over the windows and the lamps on and a smell of smoke still in the curtains.

Chris had not wanted it there. He had wanted somewhere neutral. Tarquin had said, pleasantly, *there is nowhere neutral in Torbay, Mr Harvey, and they know it*, and Mary Eden had said, through Tarquin, that she would come to Bailey's, and that was that.

The long deal table with the green baize Tarquin had brought down from Pimlico in his car, folded, as if it were a flag. Five chairs on one side and three on the other. A pot of tea. A single sheet of paper, typed, in a leather folder.

On Rage's side: Chris, in the middle. Jono, on his left, in his tunic, with his lanyard, because he had come from a call and was going to another. Vicky, on his right, for Tan, with her laptop shut in front of her. Richard, at the end, with his box file. And at the other end, a little apart from the table, in a chair by the boarded-up window, Rani.

Keith was not there. Keith was in the cellar with his hand on the stone. He had said, when Chris asked him, *I've been to this one*, and nothing else.

On the other side: Tarquin, in the middle, in his navy suit, with the leather folder. And at a quarter past eleven, through the door from the hall, Mary Eden.

* * *

Chris had never seen her close.

He had seen her in photographs. On the *Herald*'s website, at a charity dinner, at the opening of something, with her hand on the arm of a councillor. A tall woman of about fifty with a good jacket and a face that was perfectly pleasant and perfectly still. He had seen her in his own archive, on his father's tapes, as a girl of fifteen at the back of a crowd at a regatta in 1991, beside a woman who must have been her grandmother. He had a file on her. He had a file on all of them.

He had not expected her to look ill.

She came in on Steve's arm. Steve, in his too-new suit, with his iPad under his other arm and his face very careful. And Mary beside him, straight, very straight, in a dark jacket, walking the way people walk when every step is a decision. Her face was the colour of the plaster on the wall. There was a faint mark at her left temple where she had been pressing her fingers.

She sat down across from Chris. Steve sat beside her. Neither of them looked at the lamps over Rage's heads. Chris saw them not look.

He looked at theirs.

Steve's: bright. Brighter than Chris had expected. Brighter than Mary's.

Mary's: steady, cool, middling. And a little lower over her head than lamps usually sat. As if it were tired.

"Mr Harvey," said Mary Eden.

"Mrs Eden."

"I'm told your great-grandfather and my great-great-grandfather knew each other."

"I'm told they did."

"Charles Eden was a collector," said Mary. "He bought things. Beautiful things. From all over the world." She looked at Chris across the green baize with her pleasant, still face. "He was killed by dogs on Daddyhole Plain in 1896. I can see the place from my terrace. I look at it every morning." She paused. "I've never once believed it was dogs."

"No," said Chris. "It wasn't."

She held his eyes for a moment. Then she looked down at the leather folder, and opened it, and took out the pen that was lying in it.

"Shall we?" she said.

* * *

The agreement was one page. Tarquin had written it. It was very short and very plain, and it said nothing at all that a newspaper could have used.

Eden, through its companies in Jersey and London and elsewhere, would sell every property, lease, option and interest it held in Torbay, within twelve months, at fair value, to purchasers to be agreed, the first of which would be the Torbay fund administered by Ms V. Ooi. Eden would withdraw from every board, trust, committee and company in the bay. Eden would make no further payments to any person holding public office in Torbay.

In return, Rage would publish nothing. No document, no list, no ledger. Rage would make no complaint to any police force, regulator or court about anything that had happened before the date of the agreement. Rage would leave the matter of individuals to the proper authorities, which would deal with it, the agreement said, *in due course and with discretion*.

And two lines at the bottom, which Tarquin had added on Thursday night and read out loud to Chris over the phone, very

carefully. That the device known to the parties would remain where it was. And the relay with it. And neither would leave Torbay.

"In due course and with discretion," said Jono, when Tarquin had finished reading it out in the back room.

"Yes," said Tarquin.

"For now."

Tarquin looked at him across the table with his pale grey eyes, and did not say anything.

Mary Eden signed. Her hand was quite steady. She signed in a fine sloping hand, the way women of her grandmother's generation had been taught to sign, and blotted it with a sheet of blotting paper from the folder, and passed the pen across.

Chris picked it up.

He looked at the paper. At the line where his name was going to go. At *in due course and with discretion*.

He thought about the boy on the roof of the bus shelter, nearly falling.

He signed.

Tarquin witnessed it. Then he closed the folder, and put it into his briefcase, and locked the briefcase, and said, in his pleasant voice, to the room, "Thank you. That's done, then," as if they had agreed the date of a cricket match.

* * *

It was Rani who spoke.

She had not moved all through it. She had sat in her chair by the boarded window, a little apart from the table, very still, the way she sat everywhere now. Watching. Not the paper. The people. Their lamps. The cords.

"Where's the Mayor?" she said.

Everybody looked at her.

Tarquin turned in his chair. "I'm sorry?"

"The Mayor," said Rani. "Robinson. Where is he?" Her voice was quiet and level. "He's in the book. Page forty-one. Twelve times. He's the biggest name in it. Why isn't he at this table?"

Tarquin looked at her for a moment. Chris saw him take her in. A small woman with very still shoulders and a grain of rice behind her left ear.

"The Mayor isn't a party to this agreement," said Tarquin. "He's an elected official. He answers to the electorate. And the proper authorities."

"He answers to them," said Rani.

She did not point. She did not move at all. She looked across the room at Mary Eden.

Mary Eden did not look back. She was looking at the leather folder in front of her, at the place on the green baize where it had been, with her hands folded on the table, and her face had not changed.

But Chris saw her hands. He saw them tighten. The right on the left. The knuckles going white. The way you grip a rail when the floor moves.

And Steve, beside her, looked at Rani.

Steve had not looked at anybody in Rage all morning. He looked at Rani now. A long look. And something went across his careful face that Chris had not seen there before, in nine years of photographs. Not fear. Recognition. The look of a man who has heard somebody else say out loud the thing he has been thinking in the dark for months.

Rani held his eyes.

Then she looked away, at the boarded window, and did not say anything else.

"Well," said Tarquin, into the silence, standing up. "I think we've all earned a drink."

* * *

There was champagne at one.

Tan had sent it. A case of it, from Singapore, flown in on Thursday, with a card in his own hand: *To the people of Torbay, who did not burn the forge. T.* Annie opened it in the public bar, behind the boarded windows, with the lamps on, and poured it into whatever glasses had not been broken on Wednesday night, which were mostly tumblers and half-pint mugs.

It was not a party. Nobody had the heart. It was the kind of drink you have after a funeral, standing up, in your coat, with people you know, because it would be wrong not to. The Lightwave men came over from the forge in their aprons. Fred came, with soot on his face and a burn on his forearm, and was given a half-pint mug of champagne by Annie and stood holding it as if it might go off. Ken made a short speech about the fire hose that made everybody laugh. Maureen cried and said it was the bubbles.

Mary Eden did not stay. She had gone at twenty past eleven, straight after the signing, on Steve's arm, through the door to the hall, without looking back. Tarquin stayed for one glass and then drove back to London with the folder locked in his boot.

Chris stood by the boarded window of the public bar with a tumbler of champagne in his good hand and looked out through the gap between two sheets of plywood at Station Square.

The station a black shell, still smoking. The canopy on the ground in a heap of twisted iron. The forge across the way, its big

doors open, its fire going, as if nothing had happened. The barriers up at the level crossing.

In due course and with discretion.

He drank the champagne. It was very good. He did not taste it.

Rani was standing a little way off by the bar, with her glass full in her hand, not drinking it. Watching the door to the hall. The door Mary Eden had gone out through.

Chris looked at her for a long time.

He did not ask her what she was watching for. He thought, afterwards, that if he had, everything might have gone differently, and that she would not have told him, and that it would not.

* * *

At half past three he left.

He left the champagne and the Lightwave men and Fred with his mug and walked out of the side door of Bailey's into the yard, where the gunman had gone in April, and got a taxi from the rank by the boarded station, and went up the hill to Widecombe Cot.

Because it was Friday the thirteenth of October. And she always came on a Friday in October.

His mother was at the desk.

She had been at the desk since three o'clock. She was ninety-three. She sat at the reception desk in the hall at Widecombe Cot in her good cardigan with her glasses on and her stick hooked over the edge of the desk and the register open in front of her, the way she had sat there every October since 1950, when she was fifteen and her mother had first let her. She did not look up when Chris came in.

"You smell of smoke," she said.

"I know."

"And champagne."

"I know, Mum."

She turned the register round on the desk so that he could see it. A big book, bound in green cloth, the kind they had stopped making in the sixties. Her own hand all down the left-hand page, the bookings for the week, small and neat and a little less steady than it had been. And at the bottom, under Friday, in a different hand, small, very neat, perfectly regular, every letter the same height, like print:

Friday, 13th October. Miss Ania. Room 3. No address.

"It was there this morning," said Wendy. "When I opened it. It always is."

Chris looked at it.

"Every year," said his mother, "since 1945. Before I've written the date. I've never once seen her write it." She turned the book back round. "Sit down, love. You make the hall look untidy."

He sat down on the bench by the door, under the barometer, where guests sat to take their boots off. He sat with his hands between his knees and looked at the front door, at the glass in it, at the garden beyond, and the monkey puzzle, and the gate.

At ten past four the gate went.

* * *

She came up the path under the monkey puzzle with her carpet bag, the way she always had. A young woman in a grey costume, very straight, with her dark hair up, and no coat, though it was October and raining a little. Neither pretty nor plain. The rain did not seem to touch her. It did not seem to miss her either.

She came up the steps and in at the front door and across the hall, and stopped at the desk, and put the carpet bag down at her feet.

Chris looked at the air above her head.

Nothing. The gap. The place on a switchboard where a socket had been, and been unscrewed. He had known it would be there. Rani had told him. He had not seen it himself until now, here, in his own hall, under the barometer, and he found that he could not look at it for long.

"Good afternoon, Wendy," said Ania.

"Good afternoon, Miss Ania," said his mother. "Room 3. It's ready for you."

Ania did not pick up the pen. She never did. She looked down at Wendy's hand on the register, at the old fingers, the knuckles big with arthritis now, the faint blue stain on the side of the middle finger where a pen had rested every day for sixty-three years.

Then she looked at Chris, on the bench by the door.

"Good afternoon, Chris."

"Good afternoon."

She looked at him for a long time. At his face. At the smoke on his coat. At the champagne he could still taste. At whatever she saw, over his head, where his own lamp was, middling, eighteen, with a cord going out of it to Brixham that she could see better than Rani could.

"You signed," she said.

"Yes."

She nodded slowly. As if that were the right answer, or the answer she had expected, or both, which with her was always the same thing.

"Yes," said Ania. "You would."

She picked up her carpet bag.

At the foot of the stairs she stopped, without turning round, the way she always did, with her hand on the newel post.

"It will be a fortnight this year, Wendy," she said. "I leave on the last Monday."

"You always do, Miss Ania."

"Yes," said Ania. "I always do."

And she went up the stairs to Room 3, the one with the view of the bay, and Chris heard the door close.

* * *

His mother sat at the desk with her hand flat on the register for a long time.

"She's tired this year," she said at last.

Chris did not say anything.

"I've watched her come up that path every October for seventy-eight years," said Wendy. "I've never once seen her tired." She took her glasses off and folded them and put them down on the register, on the line in the small regular hand. "Go and put the kettle on, love. She won't drink it. But put it on."

Chris went down the passage to the kitchen and put the kettle on.

While it boiled he stood at the kitchen window and looked out at the back garden in the rain, and the monkey puzzle, and the wall, and over the wall, far off, the bay, grey, with Berry Head going out into it at the far end, long and flat, like the bow of a ship.

He had signed. Eden was going. The fire was out. Nobody had died.

Two weeks and three days to the last Monday.

He did not know why he counted it. He had not counted anything since a platform at Torquay in 2018. He found, standing at the kitchen window with the kettle coming to the boil behind him, that he could not stop.

Chapter 26 – *Rani*

Thurs. 26 Oct. 2028. Mrs Hellier's, Goodrington, 11.04 a.m. Radio on. Doing her feet. She said: "Somebody's shot the Mayor, dear." Looked at the clock. Wrote the time. Then the rest.

Rani saw it on the Monday after the agreement, in the council chamber, at a meeting about bins.

She had not meant to go. She had gone because Vicky had asked her to, because the agenda had an item on it about clearing up Station Square and Vicky wanted someone there who could read the room. So she sat in the public gallery under the painted ceiling at the Town Hall on Castle Circus, in the back row, on her own, with her hands in her lap, and watched the committee come in.

The same nine. The same three officers. The same lamps, dim, over the same heads. The chairman in his blue suit.

And the cords.

She had watched those cords for six weeks. Every one of them had gone the same way. Out of the bottom of the lamp, up through the painted ceiling, out over the town, south and east, up the hill to a house above Daddyhole Plain. Thin, taut, old. Like the strings of a puppet, she had thought once, and then not let herself think it again, because it was too easy.

On the Monday after the agreement, they did not go up the hill.

She sat very still in the back row of the gallery and looked.

Not one of them went up the hill any more. Not the chairman's, not the officers', not any of the six. The agreement had been signed on Friday and by Monday the cords had come down off the hill like washing off a line, and they were going somewhere else.

They were going sideways. Across the chamber. Through the oak-panelled wall behind the committee table. Through the wall, and along, and up, one floor, to the front of the building.

To the old committee room above the steps. With the tall windows onto Castle Circus.

* * *

She went up there the next day.

She did not go in. She did not need to. She stood in the corridor on the first floor of the Town Hall on Tuesday afternoon, with a folder under her arm that Vicky had given her as a reason, looking at a noticeboard about recycling, and through the half-open door at the end of the corridor she could see a man at a desk.

Tall. Grey. Good suit. A pleasant, handsome face. Hands folded on a blotter. A portrait over the fireplace behind him of an old man with side-whiskers and the same face.

His lamp was bright. She had known it would be. She had heard Steve's careful face across the green baize on Friday, and seen Mary Eden's knuckles go white, and she had known.

But she had not known this.

Every cord in the building came to him.

The committee's, from the chamber below, coming up through the floor. The officers', from their offices along the corridor. Cords she did not recognise, from rooms she had not been in, from the planning department in the basement, from the finance office, from somewhere on the top floor. Twenty. Thirty. Thin and taut and old, coming through the walls and the floor and the ceiling from every direction, the way the lines must have come into the old exchange on the fifth floor at Fleet House in the photographs at the museum, every line in the town going to one board. All of them going into the bottom of the bright lamp over the head of the man at the desk.

And out of the top of it, one cord.

One. Going up. Out through the tall window onto Castle Circus. Out over the town. Not south, not up the hill to Daddyhole. East. Out over the harbour, over the sea, over the curve of the world, further than any cord she had ever seen. So far she could not follow it with her eyes. It went out over the Channel into the grey, towards France, towards the North Sea, towards somewhere very cold and very old that she had never been, and it was the thickest, tautest, oldest-looking cord she had ever seen in her life.

Robinson sat at his desk with every cord in the Town Hall coming into him, and one going out, and turned a page.

Rani stood in the corridor with the folder under her arm and understood.

Eden is leaving Torbay, Tarquin had said. *Peacefully.*

Eden had left. The house above Daddyhole Plain was being sold. The companies in Jersey were selling. Mary Eden's cords had come down off the hill.

And every one of them had been plugged in again, here. Into a man in a chain who was not leaving. Who had not signed anything. Who was an elected official, answerable to the electorate and the proper authorities, and who would sit at this desk with every name in the ledger wired into him, waiting, while Rage published nothing and made no complaint and left the matter of individuals to be dealt with in due course and with discretion.

He was the part that stayed behind. The hand behind the hand, left in the Mayor's office. Waiting for Torbay to relax.

And she was the only person in the world who could see it.

* * *

She tried.

She told Chris on the Tuesday night, in the cellar. Chris listened. He listened properly, the way he did, with his bad hand in his lap and his eyes on her face, and at the end he was quiet for a long time, and then he said, "I believe you."

"But?"

"But I can't see it," said Chris. "Nobody can, except you. Vicky and Annie haven't been in that building since Friday. Clifford can't see cords. Jono can't. I can't." He rubbed his face with his good hand. "And we've signed. Rani, if I go to Tarquin and say *one of our people with a thing in her head has looked at the Mayor and seen him wired to Hamburg*, he'll tear it up. And the next bottle that goes into Station Square, somebody dies."

"Somebody's going to die anyway."

Chris looked at her.

She did not say anything else. She had said too much. She saw him see it.

She told Keith.

Keith did not say anything at all. He sat at the end of the long desk with his hand on the stone in its foam cradle and his two lamps burning over his head, the near one and the far one, and listened to her, and when she had finished he looked at her for a long time with those old eyes, the way her grandmother had looked at her when she was nine and said she was going to be a police officer.

"You knew," said Rani. "On the Monday. In September. When you asked if I was good at waiting."

"Yes."

"Tell me I'm wrong."

Keith was quiet.

"I can't," he said.

"Tell me what to do."

"I can't do that either." He turned the cup on the desk a quarter turn by the handle. "It's not mine to tell. I can nudge. I can't push. If I push, it costs, and the cost comes out of things I can't spare." He looked at her. "And you'd do it differently."

"Would I?"

He did not answer.

She went home to the flat on Union Street above her father's shop and lay on her bed in the dark and looked at the ceiling and thought about Ania, in the back room at Bailey's, at the little table in the window, with her tea in both hands and no lamp over her head at all.

Some of them will be true, and you will be the only one who can see them. That is the hardest. Nobody will be able to tell you whether you are right.

What do I do then?

You will know. You are very good at waiting.

* * *

The rifle had been under the floor of her father's shop since 1972.

Her grandfather had brought it from Kenya, in a long wooden case wrapped in a sari, when the family came over with two suitcases and nothing else and settled in Leicester, and then, in 1980, in Torquay, because her grandfather wanted to see the sea. He had been a game warden's clerk in Nairobi. He had never told anybody in England he had it. He had put it under the floor of the stockroom in the shop on Union Street, under the boards, behind the boxes of crisps, and told nobody but his son, and his son had told nobody but Rani, once, when she was sixteen and had just been told by her father that girls did not join the police. *Your grandfather*

could shoot, her father had said, very quietly, at the kitchen table. *If you are going to do this, you should know where it comes from.*

She had never touched it. Nine years in the police, five on firearms, and she had never once lifted the boards.

She lifted them on the Wednesday night.

* * *

The ceremony was at eleven on Thursday.

It had been announced in the *Herald* on the Saturday. *MAYOR TO LEAD STATION SQUARE RECOVERY.* A small stage by the burnt-out shell of the station, under the scaffolding. Bunting, red and gold, the colours of the new county. The Torbay Silver Band. The Mayor, in his chain, to unveil a board showing the plans for the new station, which would be paid for, the article said, by a gift from a local family who were leaving the bay after many years and wished to give something back.

It did not say which family. It did not need to.

Rani was on the roof of the Picture House by five in the morning.

The old cinema, halfway down Torbay Road, empty since before she was born, with its little dome. She had been up there twice in September, at night, to look. From the flat leads behind the dome, between two chimneys, lying down, you could see straight up Torbay Road to Station Square. Two hundred and forty yards. The stage by the station. The scaffolding. Clear.

She lay down on the wet leads between the chimneys at five, in the dark, in the rain, in a black waterproof, with the long wooden case beside her, and did not move.

She had done eleven hours once, in Plymouth, in February. This was six.

* * *

It rained all morning. Not hard. A thin cold steady rain coming in off the sea, the kind that does not fall so much as hang. By ten the square was filling. People with umbrellas. Children in wellingtons. The band in their red jackets, under a gazebo, tuning up. The bunting going limp in the wet.

And the lamps. Over every head. Amber, steady, going to and fro across the square like lanterns.

At half past ten the Town Hall car pulled up behind the station.

At a quarter to eleven he came out onto the little stage.

Rani watched him through the scope. Tall. Grey. A dark coat. And on the dark cloth of the coat, round his shoulders, catching what light there was, the chain. Heavy gold links as big as a child's hand, enamelled, with the badge hanging from the middle of it. A ship and a castle and a tower.

His lamp, bright, over his grey head.

Every cord in the square going into it. Not just the Town Hall's now. Others. People in the crowd she did not know. A man by the band. Two women under an umbrella. A boy. Thin, new cords, from people who had come to see their Mayor and had looked at his bright lamp and wanted, without knowing it, to be told what to do.

And the one going out of the top. East. Over the sea. Thick and taut and old.

Behind him on the stage, a few feet back, in a dark coat, very straight, very pale, a woman. Mary Eden. Standing where the family who were leaving would stand, to be thanked. Her lamp low and tired over her head, and no cord coming out of it at all. Cut. Hanging. Like a kite string when the kite has gone.

And behind Mary, close, at her shoulder, a fair woman in a good grey coat, leaning very slightly forward, saying something into Mary's ear.

Rani did not move the scope to her. She did not need to. She knew who it was. She had been in the cellar when Jono came in on Thursday morning with a blank page in his pocketbook and a face like a sheet, and Chris had looked at him and not asked.

She kept the scope on Robinson.

* * *

The band played something. The crowd clapped. A man from the council said some words into a microphone that the rain took away. Then the Mayor stepped forward to the front of the stage.

He smiled. The pleasant, handsome smile. He looked out over the crowd in the rain, at the lamps, at the bunting, at the burnt station behind him and the forge across the way with its doors open and its fire going, and his face was perfectly kind.

He lifted his hand to wave.

A broad back, from where Mary Eden stood. A dark coat. A chain lying on the dark cloth. A hand lifted.

Rani breathed out. Slowly. All of it. The way they had taught her at the range at Middlemoor, and the way her grandfather, she supposed, had been taught in Kenya, and his father before him, somewhere she had never been. You breathe out and you wait for the bottom of the breath, the still place, where the body stops moving for a moment and there is nothing between you and the thing you are looking at.

Nobody will be able to tell you whether you are right.

She was the only one who could see it.

She waited at the bottom of the breath.

Then she let go.

* * *

A crack, flat and hard, not loud. Smaller than you would think. The rain took most of it.

In the scope, the Mayor's lifted hand stopped in the air.

His head went forward, as if he had seen something on the ground he wanted to pick up. And he folded, slowly, from the knees, forward, onto the wet boards of the stage, and the chain swung out from his chest as he went and struck the boards before he did, and from two hundred and forty yards away, through the rain, Rani heard it. Or thought she did. A sound like coins dropped on a counter.

The gold links on the wet boards, in a curve, catching the light.

The bright lamp over his head flickered once, and went out.

And every cord in the square, every cord that had gone into it, every thin new one from the crowd and every old taut one from the Town Hall, went slack at the same moment, and fell, and lay on the wet air like dropped string.

The one going out of the top, east, over the sea, did not go slack.

It snapped.

Rani saw it go. A long way out, over the harbour, over the grey water. It parted, the way a hawser parts on a quay under too much weight, and the two ends of it whipped back, one towards the stage and one out to sea, towards the cold, and were gone.

Behind the fallen man on the stage, Mary Eden stood very still with her hands at her sides and her eyes wide open, looking at the gold links on the boards. Not screaming. Not moving. Looking.

At her shoulder, the fair woman in the grey coat had stopped speaking. She was looking up Torbay Road. Straight up it. Two hundred and forty yards. At the roof of the Picture House, at the dome, at the two chimneys.

Rani did not move.

The fair woman looked for a long moment. Then she turned, and put her hand very lightly on Mary Eden's arm, and drew her back off the stage, into the crowd, into the screaming, into the rain.

* * *

Rani was off the roof in four minutes, down the back of the Picture House the way she had come, through the yard, along the lane behind the shops, with the case in a builder's bag over her shoulder. She was in her father's stockroom by twenty past, with the boards back down and the crisps back on top of them. She was in the shower by half past.

She did not let herself think until she was dressed.

Then she sat on the edge of her bed with her hair wet and her hands in her lap and found that they were not shaking. That frightened her more than anything. Five years on firearms and she had never once fired at a person. Her hands should have been shaking. They were perfectly still.

She went out at one. She did not decide where. Her feet went, the way Vicky's had gone down Torbay Road with her eyes shut.

To Studio Ania. To the street door. Down the cellar stairs.

* * *

He was alone. Clifford had gone to the square. Chris was in the square. Everybody was in the square, or on the phone, or watching it on the news, which was showing it over and over, from a hundred angles, from every phone in the crowd: the hand lifted, the chain, the fall.

Keith was at the end of the long desk with his hand on the stone.

He looked up when she came down the stairs. He did not say anything. He looked at her face. Then at the air above her head. At her lamp, which she had not looked at since five o'clock that morning and did not want to know about.

Something went across his face. It was not surprise. It was not anger. It was the look her grandmother had given her when she was nine. The long look. Sad and patient. As if he could see the whole of it laid out ahead of her, every year, like a road. And had always been able to. And had sat in this cellar in September and asked her if she was good at waiting, knowing exactly what he was asking.

"You knew," said Rani.

"Yes."

"You knew in September. You knew what I'd—" She stopped. "You knew what I'd be."

Keith did not answer. He stood up. He took his hand off the stone, which she had never once seen him do except to drink, and came round the end of the desk, and stood in front of her.

"I knew," he said. "I've known for a long time. I didn't know it would be you until I saw you in this room." He was very close. "I'm sorry."

She looked up at him. At the young face and the old eyes. At the two lamps over his head, one behind the other. At the cord going out of both of them into the stone behind him, and at the other thing, which she had seen in September and never told anybody, because she had not understood it. A second cord, very faint, coming out of the near lamp. Not to the stone. Going out, south, towards Brixham. Short and bright. The same as Chris's.

She did not care.

She put her hand on the back of his neck and pulled his face down and kissed him.

He did not stop her.

He stood very still, the way Jono had said he had stood for Annie, with his eyes shut. And then, after a moment, one of his hands came up and rested on her wet hair. Lightly. The way you put your hand on the head of a child who has done something that cannot be undone, and does not know yet what it is going to cost.

* * *

They found the rifle on the Saturday. Not hers. A rifle, in a skip behind the station, that had nothing to do with anything, and that the police announced with some confidence on the Saturday evening and quietly stopped mentioning on the Monday.

By then they had arrested Jono.

They came for him on the Thursday night, at nine, two detectives from Exeter, and took him out of his house in Preston in front of his neighbours. It made sense. Everybody said so. An ex-police officer with a grudge, whose career the Mayor had blocked in 2006. A man who had stood up in a pavilion the night before the riot with fifteen hundred people shouting *read the book*. A man with a book in his pocket. A Hills.

He sat in an interview room in Torquay police station for nine hours and answered every question and did not ask for a solicitor.

At six in the morning the door opened and a detective sergeant came in. Not one of the ones from Exeter. A man in his forties with a tired, careful face, who had worked with Jono for six years after the old DS retired, and was, Jono knew, the best copper in Devon. He sat down across the table and held out his hand.

"Pocketbook, Jono."

Jono gave it to him.

The DS opened it at the last page. He read. Thursday the twenty-sixth. *Mrs Hellier's, Goodrington, 11.04 a.m. Radio on. Doing her feet.* The time. The weather. What she had said. What he had said. Her feet. Her tablets. Her teeth.

"She'll confirm that?" said the DS.

"She'll confirm it," said Jono, "and then she'll tell you you need a haircut."

The DS almost smiled. He turned back a page. And another. A hundred and thirty-three years of Hills, writing it down. The date, the time, the weather. What you saw. Not what you felt.

He closed it and gave it back.

"Go home, Jono," he said.

Jono went home.

He did not write anything about it in the pocketbook. He did not write anything about anything for two days. He sat at his kitchen table in Preston with the pocketbook closed in front of him and thought about a small woman with very still shoulders who had sat by the boarded window at Bailey's on Friday and asked where the Mayor was. And who had not come to the square on Thursday. And who, Annie had told him on the phone, very quietly, had not answered her door since.

He did not ask anybody anything.

He was a Hills. He knew exactly how much he did not want to know.

Chapter 27 – *Mary*

Sat. 28 Oct. 2028. Mrs Hellier's, Goodrington, 7.10 a.m. Radio: woman found dead at first light on the slope below a garden wall above Daddyhole Plain. Mrs H. said: "That's the Eden house, dear. They always did have trouble with that wall." Then asked for her teeth.

The migraines stopped on Thursday at four minutes past eleven, and Mary Eden had not had one since.

She noticed it on the Friday morning, waking. She lay in bed in the room with the blinds down and waited for the light at the edge of her eye, the bright fault low on the left, the way she had waited every morning since February. It did not come. She lay there for an hour, waiting. Nothing. The ceiling, the blind, the clock. A clear head, for the first time in nine months, like a room when somebody has finally turned off a radio that has been playing in it for so long you had stopped hearing it.

She got up. She washed her face. She looked, for once, in the mirror.

Her lamp. Low and tired over her head, a cool steady glow, dimmer than she would have liked. And nothing coming out of the bottom of it. She could not see cords. She did not have the thing behind the ear. But she knew. She had felt it go on Friday, a week ago, at Bailey's, with the pen in her hand, the way you feel a tooth come out. And she had felt the last of it go on Thursday, on the stage, in the rain, when the man in front of her folded forward onto the boards.

She had seen it. The dream. Awake. Every piece of it, in order, exactly. The square. The wet. The bunting. The broad back in the

dark coat. The hand lifted. The crack, flat and small. The gold links on the boards in a curve.

And the woman's voice behind her, very calm, saying something she could not hear.

She had heard it, on Thursday. For the first time. She had been standing behind him on the stage in the rain and a fair woman in a grey coat had come up close at her shoulder, and leaned forward, and said into her ear, very quietly, in that English with nothing in it, just as the Mayor lifted his hand:

Look at his face, Mary. Not his back. His face. You have been trying to see it for nine months.

And Mary had looked. And he had turned his head, a little, as he raised his hand, to smile at somebody in the crowd, and she had seen his face. Pleasant. Handsome. Kind. Robinson. Nobody else. Just a man she had paid for.

And then he had fallen.

* * *

She spent the day packing.

The house was being sold. Everything was being sold. The paintings her grandmother had bought and her mother had insured were wrapped in brown paper and leaning against the walls of the drawing room in rows, with labels on, for a man from an auction house in London who was coming on Monday. The books were in crates. The furniture had little coloured stickers on it, red for sell, green for store, blue for Jersey, though she did not know any more what was going to Jersey or why. The leather album of cuttings that her grandmother had shown her when she was eleven, with the story of Daddyhole Plain in it, was on the desk in the study, open, because she had not been able to decide which crate it went in.

Margaret had gone. Mary had let her go on Monday, with six months' wages and a reference that would get her a job anywhere in England. Margaret had cried. Mary had not known what to do with that, and had stood in the hall with her hands at her sides until Margaret stopped.

So she packed alone. All day. In the big quiet house above the bay, with the October light going across the rooms. She found she did not mind. She found she was almost, for the first time she could remember, not unhappy.

At six, Steve came.

* * *

He came up the drive in his car, slowly, and stopped at the gate, properly this time, and waited for it to open, and came on. He came in at the front door, which was open, and found her in the drawing room among the wrapped paintings, and stood in the doorway with his iPad under his arm. A new iPad. The old one was at the bottom of Brixham harbour. She had heard about that.

"Mrs Eden."

"Steve." She was sitting on a packing crate with a cup of tea. "Come in. There's nowhere to sit. Sit on a crate."

He did not sit. He stood in the doorway in his too-new suit, and she saw that he was frightened, and that he had come anyway, and she looked at him with something that she realised, after a moment, was interest. She had never once in nine years been interested in Steve.

"I've brought the completions," he said. "For the hotels. Six of the nine have exchanged. The other three by Christmas. The Torbay fund's taken four. Ms Ooi was very..." He hesitated. "Fair."

"Good."

"And I've come to resign."

Mary put her cup down on the crate beside her.

"I'm not going to Jersey," said Steve. "Or London. Or wherever. I'm staying in Torquay." He swallowed. "And there's something else I have to tell you. Because I think you should hear it from me." He looked at the floor. "I kept a record. Since 2019. Every payment that went through the companies I set up for you. Every one. Dates, sums, who to. On a spreadsheet. On a drive in a drawer in my flat." He made himself look up. "I gave it to a detective sergeant in Torquay yesterday afternoon. After the Mayor. The one who let Jono Hills go."

He stood in the doorway and waited for her face to go still, like a pond. For the cold voice. For *I do not need you to be clever*.

Mary Eden looked at him for a long time.

"Good," she said.

Steve stared at her.

"Good," said Mary again. She picked up her tea. "Somebody should have. I'm glad it was you." She looked at him over the cup. "You were always cleverer than I let you be, Steve. I knew it. I didn't want to know it. Your lamp's brighter than mine. I saw it on Friday, at Bailey's, in the glass of the door." She drank. "Go on. Go home. Stay in Torquay. Do something with it."

He stood there.

"Thank you, Mrs Eden," he said at last.

"Mary," she said. "Since it's the end."

He did not say it. She saw him not be able to. He nodded, and turned, and went out through the hall, and she heard his car start on the gravel, and go down the drive, slowly, and stop at the gate, and wait for it to open, and go.

She sat on the packing crate with her cold tea and found that she was smiling. Not the smile from the terrace. Not the one for a butterfly. Another one, that she did not have a name for.

* * *

At ten she went out onto the terrace.

It was a clear night, cold, the first really cold night of the autumn, with a moon nearly full over the sea and the whole of the bay laid out below her, silver and black. Meadfoot, the islands, Hope's Nose going out grey into the moonlight. Across the water, small and far, the low line of Berry Head and the lighthouse turning. And directly below the wall, two hundred feet down, the rough green shelf of Daddyhole Plain, silver now, with the gorse black in clumps along the edge of the cliff and the path running through it to the old coastguard hut.

She went to the balustrade and put her hands on the cold stone.

She put her hand to her throat, under her collar, and took out the whistle on its fine black cord.

Cold. Always cold. A small curved thing, yellowish, the length of her finger, with three holes in it that no drill had made. *Mongol. Bought in Peking by your great-great-grandfather. Taken off his body on the Plain. Wear it. Never blow it.*

Why not?

Because something will come.

She had worn it for thirty-four years. She had never once blown it.

She held it in her fingers on the terrace in the moonlight, and looked down at the Plain, and thought about blowing it now. Once. To see. On the last night. She thought that she would like to know, before she left, whether her grandmother had been telling the truth about anything.

She put it to her lips.

"Don't," said a voice behind her.

* * *

Mary did not turn round at once.

She had not heard the French windows open. She never did. She took the whistle away from her mouth and held it in her hand on the stone of the balustrade, and looked down at the Plain, and said:

"You've come to say goodbye."

"Yes," said Karina Petrick.

She came and stood at the balustrade beside Mary. Not close. A yard away. In her good grey coat, with her hands in her pockets, looking down at the Plain in the moonlight. Fair, and very calm, and about forty. Her lamp, over her head, bright, white-gold, much brighter than Mary's.

"You saw his face," said Karina. "On Thursday. I watched you."

"Yes."

"And?"

"It was just him." Mary turned the whistle over in her fingers. "Nobody I loved. I'd thought, for nine months, that it would be somebody I loved. That that was why I kept seeing it." She almost laughed. "It wasn't. It was a man I'd paid for. I didn't feel anything at all."

Karina did not say anything.

"I never did have anybody," said Mary. "Did I. To love. My grandmother saw to that. And you."

"Yes," said Karina quietly. "We saw to that."

* * *

They stood at the balustrade for a while, the two of them, in the cold, looking at the bay.

"I signed," said Mary. "You know that. I signed and it's over and I'm glad. I'm going to London on Tuesday and I'm going to sit in a flat in Kensington with no view at all and I am never going to look at Daddyhole Plain again." She looked at the whistle. "And before I go, I'm going to write to Hamburg."

Karina went very still.

Mary did not notice. She was looking at the Plain.

"Your grandmother should know," she said. "If she's still there. If anybody's still there. Somebody should tell them what happened. Properly. Not through Jersey." She counted it off, the way Steve counted rooms. "The forge. The lamps. The man in the window at Bailey's, who's nobody, and who looks, Steve says, exactly like Chris Harvey at thirty. The ledger. The Mayor." She paused. "And your son. In Singapore. Who said no to you." She glanced sideways. "Oh, yes. I know about that. I know about more than you think. I've been in this house with you for two years."

Karina did not say anything.

"They'll want to know," said Mary. "All of it. They always want to know." She looked down at the whistle in her hand. "And then I'll be done."

* * *

"Mary," said Karina.

Her voice was very gentle. Mary had never heard it gentle. She turned her head.

"Look at the Plain," said Karina.

Mary looked.

On the silver grass of Daddyhole Plain, two hundred feet below, at the very edge of the gorse, where the path ran out towards the coastguard hut, there were three shapes.

Grey. Low. Long. Sitting. Side by side, in a row, on the moonlit grass, with their heads lifted.

Looking up.

At the wall. At the terrace. At her.

Mary stood very still with her hands on the cold stone and the whistle in her fingers and looked down at them, and they looked up at her, and they did not move. Their eyes, in the moonlight, from two hundred feet, were very pale.

Because something will come.

She had not blown it. She had not blown it. She had only held it to her lips.

"They came anyway," she said. Her voice came out of her very small. "I didn't blow it. They came anyway."

"Yes," said Karina. "They always come, in the end. Whether you blow it or not. That's what nobody in your family ever understood." She was standing closer now. Mary had not seen her move. "It's not a whistle for calling them, Mary. It's a whistle for telling them who to come for."

Mary leaned forward a little over the balustrade, to see them better. The way you lean to see something that is a long way down.

She felt a hand. Very light. On the middle of her back. Between her shoulder blades. Where you would put your hand to steady somebody on a stair.

She did not feel it push.

She would never have been able to say, afterwards, if there had been an afterwards, whether it pushed. Whether it was a push, or

only a hand, resting, and the cold, and the leaning, and the stone of the balustrade that her grandmother's father had built in 1921, the year he bought the house to look down on the place where Charles Eden died, worn smooth and a little loose at that end by a hundred years of weather. Whether she fell, or was let go of, or was given to something.

She went over.

* * *

It was not far, the first part. The wall, and then the slope below it, steep, rough grass and gorse, going down and down towards the Plain. She went down it the way the butterfly had gone down it in April. Turning. Not fast. Quite slowly, it seemed to her, in the moonlight, with the whole of the bay going round her, silver and black, the islands and Hope's Nose and the lighthouse turning on Berry Head, round, and light, and dark.

She thought, quite clearly, going down: *This is the dream. This is what it was. Not him. Me.*

She thought: *It was always me, falling. He was only the chain.*

And then the gorse, and the rocks under it, and the sound, and nothing.

* * *

Karina stood at the balustrade for a long time, looking down.

On the slope, two-thirds of the way to the Plain, in the gorse, something dark lay very still in the moonlight. Not moving. Not going to move.

On the Plain below it, the three grey shapes had stood up.

They stood in a row at the edge of the gorse, very still, with their heads lifted, looking up the slope at the dark thing in it. They did not go to it. They did not move at all.

Karina went down.

She went out through the garden, and through the little iron gate at the bottom of it that nobody had used in fifty years, and down the steep path through the gorse that the coastguards had cut in 1880, sure-footed in the dark, the way she had gone down the north face of Berry Head in the dark in April 1992. It took her eleven minutes.

Mary Eden lay on her back in the gorse with her eyes open to the moon.

Her face was perfectly still. Pleasant. Not frightened. Not anything. Like a pond.

At her throat, on its fine black cord, outside her collar now where the fall had thrown it, the whistle.

Karina knelt beside her in the gorse. She looked at Mary's face for a long time. Then she reached out, and closed Mary's eyes, gently, the way you would close a book you had finished.

Then she took the whistle.

She did not cut the cord. She lifted it, very carefully, over Mary's head, the way you would take a necklace off a sleeping child. She held it in her palm. Cold. Yellowish. The length of her finger. Three holes that no drill had made.

She did not blow it.

She stood up with it in her hand and looked down the slope at the Plain.

The three grey shapes were watching her. Not Mary. Her. And the whistle in her hand. Very still. Waiting. The way dogs wait for the one who holds the lead to say the word.

Karina looked at them for a long time.

She did not say the word.

She closed her hand over the whistle and put it in the pocket of her good grey coat.

The three grey shapes turned, all together, as one, the way a flock of birds turns, and went away across Daddyhole Plain in the moonlight towards the cliff edge, low and quick, like water going over a weir, and over the edge, and down, towards the sea. She listened. There was no splash. There never was.

There was no mark on anything. She had not cut one. Not on the wall, not on the gate, not on a post. For the first time in a hundred and thirty-two years, in that family, somebody had died in Torbay and nobody had left the sign.

* * *

She went back up the path. Through the iron gate. Through the garden, past the terrace, past the place on the balustrade where the stone was a little loose.

She went into the house through the French windows, and through the drawing room among the wrapped paintings, and into the study.

The leather album of cuttings was on the desk, open, where Mary had left it, at the page from the *Torquay Directory* of April 1896. *TERRIBLE DEATH ON DADDYHOLE PLAIN. MR CHARLES EDEN, J.P., KILLED BY DOGS.*

Karina looked at it for a moment.

Then she closed it, and picked up a pen from the desk, and a sheet of Mary's good notepaper, and wrote a letter.

It was short. She wrote it in German, in a bold black upright hand. She addressed the envelope to a house on the Elbchaussee in Hamburg.

She put the letter in the envelope, and sealed it, and stood for a long time in the study with it in her hand.

Then she tore it in half, and in half again, and put the pieces in the cold grate, and struck a match from the box on the mantelpiece, and watched them burn.

* * *

Before she left, she went back out onto the terrace once more and stood at the balustrade in the moonlight with her hand in her pocket, on the whistle.

Across the bay, small and far, on the end of Berry Head, the lighthouse was turning.

And between here and there, up the hill above Torquay, in the dark among the other roofs, a house with a monkey puzzle in the garden. She could not see it from here. She knew exactly where it was. Her grandmother had told her, when she was a little girl, in the cold house on the Elbchaussee: *There is a hotel in Torquay with a monkey puzzle tree, and a woman in Room 3 every October, and that is the only thing in England I have ever been afraid of.*

Karina stood on the terrace above Daddyhole Plain, where two Edens had died a hundred and thirty-two years apart, and looked towards it for a long time.

Then she went.

Chapter 28 – *The Bay Window*

Sat. 28 Oct. 2028. Widecombe Cot, 9.20 a.m. Called in after Mrs H. Ania at the bay-window table, a small yellowish thing in her hand. Cup full. Wendy at the desk said: "It was there when I came down. Nobody came in. I bolt that door. I've bolted it every night since 1942."

Wendy Harvey had bolted the front door of Widecombe Cot every night for eighty-six years, and on the morning of Saturday the twenty-eighth of October it was still bolted.

She checked it first. She always did. She came down the stairs at twenty to six in the dark, one step at a time, with her hand on the rail and her stick in the other hand, in her dressing gown and her good slippers, the way she had come down those stairs every morning since her mother died in 1997 and left her the house. At the bottom she turned on the hall light and went to the front door and put her hand on the bolt.

Shot. Top and bottom. The chain on. The key turned in the big old lock, the way she had turned it at eleven the night before, with Chris standing behind her in the hall saying *Mum, I'll do it*, and her saying *you will not*.

She stood with her hand on the bolt for a moment. Then she went down the passage to the kitchen and put the kettle on, because that was what you did, and while it boiled she went back along the passage to the dining room to turn the cups over.

* * *

She did it every night in October. She had done it since she was fifteen, when her mother first let her. The last thing at night, after the guests had gone up and the kitchen was clean: you laid the

breakfast tables in the dining room, the cloths and the cutlery and the sugar and the cups upside down on their saucers so they would not catch the dust. And the little table in the bay window, at the front, the one with the view of the bay, you laid last, for one, with a cup and saucer and a plate for the toast she would not eat. Cup upside down.

And in the morning, first thing, before anybody was up, you went in and turned the cups the right way up, and the dining room was ready.

Wendy turned on the dining-room light.

She looked at the tables. All of them laid, the way she had left them. Cups upside down on their saucers. Tables for Room 1 and Room 2, and the long one for the Germans in Room 7 who were going home on Monday.

And the little table in the bay window.

The cup on it was the right way up.

And beside it, on the white cloth, lying very straight, as if somebody had put it down with great care and then stood back to see that it was square, there was a small thing. Yellowish. About the length of her finger. Curved. With holes in it.

* * *

Wendy stood in the doorway of the dining room for a long time.

She did not go to it. She was ninety-three and she had seen a great many things in this house and she had learned, a long time ago, in a shelter in Torquay in an air raid with a lady in a good grey coat looking down at her, that you did not always go to things.

She looked at it from the doorway.

It was bone. She knew that without being told. Old bone, gone the colour of tea, smooth with handling. A little curved, the way a rib is curved. Three holes along it that did not look as if they had been made by anything.

She did not know what it was. She had never seen one. Jack Hills had written about it, she knew. Jono had read it to her once, at this kitchen table, from the second of Jack's books: a man on Hound Tor with something small and pale at his lips. *A whistle. Not a policeman's whistle. Bone.* She had not written it down. It was not hers. She had not thought about it since.

She thought about it now.

She looked at the bay window behind the little table. The long window with the view of the bay. Shut. The catch down. The curtains drawn back the way she had left them, because Miss Ania liked to see the sea when she came down.

She looked back at the front door down the hall. Bolted. Chained. Locked.

Nobody had come in.

Somebody had come in.

* * *

She did not touch it. She went back down the passage to the kitchen, where the kettle had boiled and was clicking itself off, and made the tea, the big brown pot, the way her mother had, warming it first. She poured herself a cup. She sat down at the kitchen table in her dressing gown with the cup in both hands, the way Miss Ania held hers, and looked at the window over the sink, which was still dark.

She thought about a lady in Hamburg.

Chris had told her. Years ago, in 2008, in the back room, after Room 3. A hall on the Elbchaussee with a Christmas tree and real

candles, and a woman of about forty with young hands, who had looked at her son and said, *You have your mother's eyes. Wendy's. How is your mother? And your grandmother, Nancy? Does she still keep the hotel? With the monkey puzzle?*

The monkey puzzle.

Wendy looked out of the kitchen window, towards the front of the house, where the monkey puzzle was, in the dark, in the front garden. She could not see it from here. She knew exactly where it was. It had stood there since before the war, since before her mother had the house, taller than the roof now, and every guest who had ever come to Widecombe Cot in eighty-six years had mentioned it.

She will not remember me, the lady in Hamburg had said to Chris. *Do not tell her that I asked.*

Wendy remembered her. She had remembered her for eighty-five years. A good grey coat. Something small and dark at her throat. Looking down at a child of seven in her nightdress in a tunnel full of people and saying, very quietly, *a child*, and turning away.

And the granddaughter. Chris's. Basil's mother. Whom Wendy had never met, and had not wanted to, and had let her son go to Hamburg for anyway, because she had been told to let him.

Somebody had been in her dining room in the night. Through a bolted door. And had turned a cup the right way up, and put a thing beside it, and gone.

Wendy drank her tea. She found that her hands were not shaking. She found that she was not frightened. She had been frightened once, in this house, in June 1944, and she had shouted, and that had been enough fright for one life.

She was angry.

* * *

She turned the radio on at seven, low, for the news.

The second item. A woman found dead at first light on the slope below a garden wall above Daddyhole Plain, in Torquay. Named locally as Mrs Mary Eden, fifty-two, a businesswoman. Police were not treating the death as suspicious at this stage. It was understood that the property was being sold.

Wendy turned the radio off.

She sat for a while. Then she got up and went back along the passage to the dining room, and stood in the doorway again, and looked at the little table in the bay window.

It had not moved. Of course it had not.

Eden. She had written that name in her green exercise book too. Roger Eden. A lieutenant in the Navy. In the tunnels, in 1943, with Douglas Hills's hand on his arm. And before him, Charles. On the Plain. *Killed by dogs.*

And now Mary. On the Plain. On the night before.

And a whistle on Miss Ania's table that had come, Wendy understood standing there, from round Mary Eden's neck.

* * *

Miss Ania came down at half past seven.

Wendy heard her on the stairs. Light, even, not hurried. The way she had come down those stairs every October morning since 1945. Wendy was at the desk in the hall by then, dressed, in her good cardigan, with the register open, because that was where she was when Miss Ania came down. She did not say anything. She looked up from the register as Miss Ania came past, the way she always did.

"Good morning, Wendy."

"Good morning, Miss Ania."

And Miss Ania went into the dining room.

Wendy got up from the desk, slowly, with her stick, and went to the dining-room door and stood in it, and watched.

Miss Ania had stopped. Just inside the door. Very straight, in her grey costume, with her hands at her sides. Looking at the little table in the bay window.

At the cup, the right way up. At the thing beside it.

She stood there for a long time. Longer than Wendy had ever seen her stand still anywhere, except once, in Room 3, in 1955, when Wendy had asked her about St Marychurch.

Then she went to the table, and sat down in her chair, with her back to the room and her face to the bay, and looked at it.

She did not touch it. Not at first.

The light was coming up over the sea. Grey, then a thin cold green at the bottom, over Berry Head. The bay was flat and still. A trawler was going out of Brixham, very small, its lights still on.

Wendy went to the kitchen and fetched the pot, the big brown one, and came back, and poured. Into the cup that was the right way up. The way she had poured for Miss Ania every October morning for seventy-eight years. She put the pot down on the table beside it, and went back to the doorway.

Miss Ania did not look at the tea.

She put out her hand, and picked up the whistle.

* * *

She held it on her open palm. In the grey light from the window. Looking at it.

Then she turned it over. Once. And again. And a third time. Slowly. The way you turn over a thing you have not held for a very long time, to see whether it is the same as you remember. The way,

Wendy thought, Johnny had said that Charles Eden turned it over on Hound Tor in 1896, *lovingly, the way a collector turns over a thing he is proud of*.

It was not like that. Wendy could see her face in the glass of the bay window, faintly, against the grey of the sea. It was not proud. It was not anything Wendy had a word for. It was the face of somebody who has been handed a key to a door they have spent a very long time hoping they would never have to open.

Miss Ania closed her hand over the whistle.

She sat there, at the little table in the bay window, with her closed hand resting on the white cloth beside the cup, looking out at the sea. The tea steamed in the cup. She did not drink it. She did not look at it.

Wendy stood in the doorway and watched the steam go up, and get less, and stop.

* * *

Chris came down at eight.

He came down the stairs too fast for a man of sixty-six with a stroke, the way he always did, and Wendy heard him stop in the hall, and then come along to the dining-room door and stop again, behind her. She did not turn round. She felt him look past her at the bay window. At Miss Ania. At the closed hand on the cloth.

"Mum," he said, very quietly. "Have you heard the news?"

"Yes."

"Mary Eden."

"Yes."

He stood behind her for a while.

"What's that?" he said. "In her hand."

"It was on the table when I came down," said Wendy. "Beside her cup. The cup was the right way up." She did not take her eyes off the bay window. "The door was bolted, Chris. Top and bottom. The chain. The key. I bolted it at eleven with you standing behind me telling me not to."

Chris did not say anything for a long time.

Then he went past her, into the dining room. Slowly. Across the room, between the tables, to the little table in the bay. He stood beside it. He did not sit down. Nobody sat at that table except Miss Ania. Nobody ever had.

"Miss Ania," he said.

She did not look up from the sea.

"Who left it?"

Miss Ania was quiet for a long time. The light was coming up over Berry Head now. Gold, at the bottom. The trawler had its lights off.

"Somebody I let go," she said. "Twice."

Wendy, in the doorway, put her hand on the door frame.

"Twice," said Chris.

"In a car park behind a station," said Miss Ania. "Seventeen days ago. In the smoke." She turned her closed hand over on the cloth, very slightly, and opened it, and looked at the whistle on her palm. "And once before that, a long time ago, in a different way. I let her stay." She looked up at him at last. "In Stoke. In Paris. Under a lamp at the Kallang. I let her stay, when I could have stopped it. And she bore your son."

Chris stood very still.

"She was here," he said. "Last night. In this house."

"Yes."

"Through a bolted door."

"Doors were never anything to that family," said Miss Ania. "Her grandmother walked through a fire door in 1943 as if it were a curtain." She closed her hand again. "She came to give me this. And to stand in this room. Once. Where her grandmother was always afraid to come." She looked down at her hand. "Her grandmother remembered the monkey puzzle. She asked you about it, in Hamburg, at Christmas. She never once in her life came near it."

* * *

"Why?" said Chris.

He said it the way he said everything to Miss Ania, Wendy thought. The way he had said it in Room 3 in 2008. As a man asks a question he already knows will not be answered.

"Why would she bring it here? To you? After Mary?" His voice was not steady. "Did she kill her?"

Miss Ania looked at him for a long time.

"Yes," she said.

"Why?"

"Because Mary had given up," said Miss Ania. "And in that family, if you give up, you are finished. That is the rule. It has always been the rule." She paused. "Or because Mary was going to write to Hamburg about a young man who looks like you at thirty, and about your son, who said no. And the people in Hamburg would have come for both of them."

She looked down at the whistle in her closed hand.

"I do not know which," she said. "I do not think she knows which." And then, very quietly, to the sea, every word the same length:

"She was always both."

* * *

Nobody said anything for a long time.

The sun came up out of the sea behind Berry Head. A long blade of gold came across the water and in at the bay window and lay on the white cloth of the little table, on the cup of cold tea, on Miss Ania's closed hand.

Wendy, in the doorway, looked at the hand in the sunlight. At the knuckles. At the fingers closed over a thing that had come off a dead woman's neck in the night.

They were not shaking. Miss Ania's hands had never once shaken in eighty-six years, that Wendy had seen.

They were not shaking now.

But they were holding on.

"Tomorrow night," said Miss Ania, to the sea, "I shall go out, Wendy. Late. Do not wait up for me."

"I always wait up for you, Miss Ania."

"Yes," said Miss Ania. "I know." She was quiet. "Do not wait up tomorrow."

Wendy looked at her son, standing by the little table in the bay window with the sun on his grey hair and his bad hand held against his chest, looking down at the closed hand on the cloth.

Then she went back along the passage to the kitchen, and poured the cold tea from Miss Ania's cup down the sink, and rinsed the cup, and dried it, and put it on the dresser, the right way up, the way she had found it.

She did not know why. She did it anyway.

She would lay the table tonight the same as always. Cup upside down.

She did not know, standing at the sink with the tea towel in her hands and the sun coming in at the window, whether in the morning she would want to find it the right way up again, or not.

Chapter 29 – *The Clearout*

Sun. 29 Oct. 2028. Castle Circus, Torquay. 11.04 p.m. A. went up the steps and in. 11.09 came out. Blew it. Heard nothing. 11.31 three came down Union Street. 11.33 she opened the door. 11.52 they came out. Went down to the sea. Did not come out. 11.58 she smiled.

The clocks had gone back that morning.

Jono had forgotten. He always forgot. He had got up at six by his phone, which knew, and looked at the kitchen clock, which did not, and stood in his kitchen in Preston in the dark for a moment with the strange feeling you get once a year in October, of having been given an hour you had not asked for and did not know what to do with.

He thought about it again at twenty to eleven that night, when the phone rang.

"Jonathan," said Wendy Harvey.

Nobody called him Jonathan except his mother and Grandad Douglas, and both of them were dead.

"Mrs Harvey."

"She's gone out," said Wendy. Her voice on the line was very steady and very old. "Ten minutes ago. Out of the front door, with no coat. She told me not to wait up." A pause. "I've never once in my life not waited up for her, Jonathan. And I'm ninety-three, and I can't follow her down the hill. And Chris is asleep, and if I wake him he'll go, and he mustn't. Not this time. I don't know why. I know he mustn't."

Jono was already standing up.

"Where?"

"Down," said Wendy. "Towards the town. Towards Castle Circus." She was quiet. "She had it in her hand. The thing from the table. I saw it from the landing window. In her hand, under the street lamp, at the gate."

"I'll go."

"Write it down," said Wendy Harvey. "Whatever it is. Every bit of it. The time. Somebody has to."

"I always do," said Jono.

"I know you do, love," said Wendy. "That's why I rang you."

* * *

He drove. Preston to Torquay, along the front, past Livermead and the Grand and the Abbey, in the dark, with the sea on his right, black, and a nearly full moon over it, and the road empty, because it was Sunday night in October and the clocks had gone back and Torquay had gone to bed early.

Every dog was silent.

He noticed it at the lights by the Strand. A man walking a lurcher along the harbour, a big grey rough-coated dog that would normally have been pulling at every bin and barking at every gull, and it was walking very close to the man's leg with its head down and its tail tucked under, and making no sound at all. Jono watched it in his mirror until it was out of sight.

He parked at the bottom of Union Street and went up on foot.

Union Street at eleven on a Sunday night. The shops dark. The pubs closing. A few people coming out of the Union Inn, quiet, going home. A taxi. The long hill going up, past the old Woolworths and the Pavilion Theatre's ghost sign and the shut-down banks, up

towards Castle Circus at the top, where the Town Hall stood with its clock tower against the sky.

The clock said four minutes past eleven.

And she was on the steps.

* * *

He stopped in the doorway of a shut-up phone shop on the corner, fifty yards down, where he could see. The way Jack would have. The way Johnny had stood in the doorway of a tea room across from a tailor's in Union Street in 1915, watching a German naval officer try on a suit.

Ania was standing at the top of the Town Hall steps. In her grey costume, no coat, very straight, with her hands at her sides. In the moonlight and the yellow light from the street lamps on Castle Circus. Looking at the big double doors.

The doors were shut. But there were lights on behind them. And above them, on the first floor, behind the tall windows of the old committee room at the front, the room that had been the Mayor's office until Thursday, the lights were on too.

Jono looked at the windows.

Shapes behind them. People. A lot of people. Standing, sitting, moving about. He could see heads, shoulders, the backs of chairs. He could see, even from here, even through glass, the lamps over the heads. Faint. Dim. Most of them very dim.

He counted. He could not help it. Twenty. Twenty-five. More.

On a Sunday night. In a dead man's office. With the lights on.

He did not know why they were there. He would find out later, from the DS, who would find out from a wife in Chelston and a husband in Babbacombe and a grown-up son in Kingskerswell: that every one of them had received, on the Saturday, by hand, through

the letterbox, a plain white envelope with no stamp and no name. And inside, a card. *Castle Circus. Sunday. Eleven p.m. The committee room.* No signature. In a small, very neat hand, perfectly regular, every letter the same height. Like print.

They had each thought, the DS said, that it was from Hamburg. From whoever came after Robinson. To tell them who held the cords now.

They had all come.

* * *

Ania went up the last step and put her hand on the door.

It opened. Jono did not see her unlock it. He did not see anybody open it from inside. She put her hand on it and it opened, both halves, inwards, and she went in, and it closed behind her.

He looked up at the windows.

He could see the room. Not well. The angle was bad, and the glass was old and reflected the street lamps. But he could see the tops of heads, and the backs of chairs, and the lamps. A long table, he thought. People round it. Some standing by the fireplace. Somebody at the window with a glass in his hand, looking down at Castle Circus, at the empty steps, at nothing.

And then the door of the room opened. He could not see it. He saw the heads turn. All of them. At once. Towards the door.

And then the lamps went out.

Not all at once. One after another. Very quickly. Like a switchboard when somebody pulls the plug. Every lamp in the room, every dim one and the few bright ones, going out, one, two, ten, twenty, from the door outwards, across the room, in a wave. And under each one, the head going down. Forward, onto the table. Sideways, onto a shoulder. The man at the window with the glass sliding down out of sight below the sill.

In four seconds, every lamp in the committee room was out, and nothing behind the glass was moving.

Jono stood in the doorway of the phone shop with his hand flat on the cold glass of the shop window behind him.

The clock on the tower said nine minutes past eleven.

* * *

She came out.

Down the inside stairs, he supposed, though he did not see. The big doors opened, inwards, and she came out onto the top of the steps, and they closed behind her, and she stood there in the moonlight, alone, with her hands at her sides.

Then she lifted her right hand to her mouth.

He saw it. Small, pale, curved. In her fingers. At her lips.

She blew.

He heard nothing.

He had known he would hear nothing. Jack had written it. *He put the bone whistle to his lips and blew, hard, so that his cheeks hollowed, and I heard nothing at all. Not a note. Not a breath through it. Only the silence of the moor, going on.* Jono had read it fifty times. He stood in the doorway of a phone shop in Union Street a hundred and thirty-two years later and heard exactly what Jack had heard. Nothing. The silence of Castle Circus at nine minutes past eleven on a Sunday night, going on.

She did not blow it hard. She did not hollow her cheeks. She held it to her lips and breathed out into it once, very gently, the way you breathe on a cold window.

And Jono saw her breath.

A small pale cloud, from the whistle, in the cold air. Going up in the moonlight. The first breath he had ever seen her make.

Then she lowered the whistle, and stood on the steps, and waited.

* * *

He waited too. He did not know how long. The clock went round. Twenty past. Twenty-five past. A car went across Castle Circus, slowly, and did not stop. Nobody came out of the Town Hall. Nothing moved behind the windows of the committee room.

And then, from very far away, inland, from the north-west, from up past Newton Abbot and Bovey and the edge of the moor, so far that at first he thought it was in his own head, a sound.

One voice. Long. Rising.

Then a second, under it.

Then a third.

He had heard Karen describe it, once, on the phone, in the spring, when she rang Chris from Berry Head and Chris had told him afterwards. *Not like a dog. A dog howls the way a child cries. This didn't want anybody to come.* He had not understood. He understood now. It came down off the moor and across the country and into the town over the roofs, three voices in a chord, not calling, not lonely, the sound of something that had always been there and was simply letting itself be heard. And it was getting closer. Not slowly. Very fast. Faster than anything on four legs had any business coming twenty miles.

And under it, all over Torquay, the silence of every dog.

At thirty-one minutes past eleven they came down Union Street.

* * *

He would write it down exactly. He had promised Wendy. He would sit at his kitchen table in Preston at four in the morning and

write it down exactly, and it would be the most exact thing he ever wrote, and he would read it back afterwards and know that it was no use at all, because nobody who had not been there would ever believe a word of it, and that was why it had to be written.

Three of them. Grey. Coming up Union Street from the bottom, from the Strand, from the sea side, though the howling had come from the moor. He did not understand that. He wrote it down anyway.

Big. He had seen them on Haytor, from two hundred yards, sitting. He had not understood how big. Bigger than any dog. Bigger than any wolf in any book. Long in the body and deep in the chest and high at the shoulder, so that their backs, as they came up the hill past the dark shops, were level with the tops of the parking meters. Grey, the grey of granite, of the mist in Jack's valleys. Moving low and very quick and absolutely silent. No sound of claws on the pavement. No breath. Nothing. Like water going uphill.

They came up the middle of Union Street in a line, one behind the other, in the moonlight, between the parked cars.

They came past the phone shop.

Jono stood in the doorway and did not move and did not breathe. They went past him at ten feet. He saw the nearest one's eye. Pale. Yellowish. It did not turn to look at him. It knew exactly where he was. It did not care.

Then they were past, and going up the last of the hill into Castle Circus, towards the steps, towards the small straight figure in grey standing at the top of them.

* * *

They stopped at the foot of the steps.

They sat down. In a row. The way they had sat round her on Haytor. Facing her. Heads up.

Ania looked down at them.

Jono could see her face. In the moonlight and the yellow lamplight. He would try to write down her face, afterwards, and fail. It was not cruel. It was not kind. It was not anything he had ever seen on it at the table in the bay window at Widecombe Cot, or on the stage at Bailey's, or under a lime tree in a churchyard in Burslem in Chris's book. It was the face, he thought, of somebody standing at a door that had been shut for a very long time, with the key in her hand, who has decided.

She turned round. She put her hand on the big double doors of the Town Hall.

They opened. Both halves. Inwards.

She stood aside.

The three grey shapes stood up, all together, and went up the steps, past her, one behind the other, and in.

The doors stayed open.

The clock on the tower said thirty-three minutes past eleven.

* * *

He did not hear anything.

That was what he would remember. Not the doors, not the wolves, not her face. That from the open doors of Torquay Town Hall, for nineteen minutes, there came no sound at all. No scream. No crash. No running feet. Nothing. Behind the windows of the committee room on the first floor, where every lamp was out and nothing moved, nothing moved.

He stood in the doorway of the phone shop and counted. He could not stop himself. The clock. The minutes.

At one point, about eleven forty, a car came round Castle Circus, a taxi, and slowed by the Town Hall, the driver looking at the open doors, the light coming out of them onto the steps, the woman in grey standing beside them in the cold. And Ania turned her head and looked at the taxi. Only looked. And the taxi driver looked back at her, and Jono saw him look at the air above her head, at the place where there was nothing, and then he put his foot down, and went, fast, round the circus and away down the hill towards the harbour.

Nineteen minutes.

At eleven fifty-two they came out.

* * *

One, two, three. Down the steps. Past her.

Grey. Big. Silent. Exactly as they had gone in.

Except their muzzles.

Dark. Wet. In the lamplight, almost black. Dark from the nose to the eyes, and down the throat, and on the chest of the first one, a great dark wet patch on the grey, as if it had leaned into something.

They did not stop. They did not look at her. They went down the steps and across Castle Circus and down Union Street the way they had come, one behind the other, low and quick and silent, past the parked cars, past the dark shops.

Past the phone shop.

The last one, as it went past, at ten feet, turned its head.

It looked at Jono. Straight at him. With its pale eyes and its wet dark muzzle, in the moonlight.

Jono looked back. He did not know he was going to. He held its eyes for perhaps two seconds, the way you hold the eyes of a dog you do not know on a doorstep at three in the morning, steady, not

challenging, not afraid, telling it *I'm here, and I'm staying here, and that's all*.

It turned its head away, and went on.

He followed them. He did not decide to. Down Union Street at a distance, fifty yards behind, in his coat, with his hands in his pockets, the way Johnny had followed a German officer down the same street a hundred and thirteen years before. Down past the Union Inn. Past the bottom of the hill. Out onto the Strand. Across the road, empty. Along the harbour, past the clock tower, past the moored boats in the moonlight. To the end of the Haldon Pier, where Wendy had stood with Leonard and David in 1944 and looked at the hards.

They went down the slipway at the end of the pier, one behind the other, into the black water.

They did not swim. Jono watched. They walked into the sea, down the slipway, the way you walk down a staircase, and the water came up over their legs, their chests, their backs, their heads. The first one. Then the second. Then the last.

The water closed over them.

He stood at the end of the Haldon Pier for half an hour, in the cold, in the moonlight, looking at the place.

They did not come out.

* * *

When he got back to Castle Circus at a quarter past midnight, she was still on the steps.

Alone. The doors behind her shut again. The lights still on in the committee room. Nothing moving behind the glass. The whistle in her hand, closed. Her hands at her sides.

She was looking down the hill. Down Union Street. Towards the sea.

And she was smiling.

Jono stood on the pavement at the bottom of the steps and looked up at her. He had seen her smile before. All his life. The smile from a long way off, at the corner of the mouth, that Wendy wrote about. Kind. Small. Patient.

This was not that.

It was not cruel. He would always say that, afterwards, to anybody who asked, which would be nobody, because he would never tell anybody but the pocketbook. It was not cruel. It was the smile of somebody who has finished a thing. Who has carried a heavy thing a very long way, by herself, for a very long time, and has just put it down. And knows exactly what it cost. And would do it again.

She looked down at him.

She did not say anything. She did not need to. He could see her breath going up, white, slow and even, in the cold. Like anybody's. Like his.

Then she came down the steps, past him, close enough to touch, and walked away across Castle Circus, uphill, towards Widecombe Cot, in the moonlight, with her hands at her sides, without a coat.

He did not follow her.

* * *

In the morning there was nobody in the committee room.

The DS told him. Jono had rung him at a quarter past midnight from Castle Circus and said *there's something you need to see in the Town Hall, and I'm not going to say what on the phone*, and the DS

had come, and the night porter had been found asleep at his desk in the hall with a cup of cold tea and woken up and known nothing, and they had gone up the stairs together, the DS and the porter and two constables, with torches.

The lights were still on in the committee room. The door was open.

Chairs pushed back from the long table. Some knocked over. Coats on the hooks by the door, twenty-six of them. Handbags on the floor. Glasses on the table, some half full, whisky and wine and water. A plate of sandwiches, untouched. Phones on the table, face down, one of them buzzing.

Nobody.

No blood. Not one drop. Not on the floor, or the table, or the walls, or the portrait of Superintendent Thomas Robinson over the fireplace, who looked down at the empty room with his pleasant, handsome face and his great good humour. No marks. Nothing broken except the chairs. Nothing.

Twenty-six people had gone into Torquay Town Hall on a Sunday night, and their coats were on the hooks, and they were not anywhere.

They were never found.

* * *

Jono did not go home until five. When he did, he sat at his kitchen table with the pocketbook and wrote it all down, every minute of it, from Wendy's phone call to the DS's torch. It took him three hours. His hand did not shake once. He wrote the last line at eight in the morning, with the light coming up grey over the roofs of Preston, and looked at it.

11.58. She smiled.

Then, at nine, Keith rang him from the cellar under Studio Ania.

"Come and look at this," said Keith. His voice was very quiet.

Jono went.

Keith was at the long desk. He had the green ledger open in front of him. Philip Carew's ledger. The one Annie had brought in a Bailey's carrier bag. Foolscap. Fourteen years. Every page written in small, neat, terrible capitals.

He turned it round so that Jono could see.

Page forty-one.

The dates were there. The sums. The companies in Jersey. The purposes. *Planning, Totnes Road site. Committee, Q3. Campaign.* Twelve lines.

And the column on the left, where the name went, where *T.R.* had been written twelve times in Philip's neat capitals, was empty.

Not crossed out. Not rubbed out. Not faded. Empty. Clean cream paper, as if nothing had ever been written there at all.

Keith turned the page. And the next. And the next. All the way through. Fourteen years. Every date, every sum, every company, every purpose, exactly where it had been.

And every name gone.

Jono stood at the long desk and looked at it.

Then he took out his own pocketbook, the thirty-third, and turned back. To September. To a list of seventeen names, in Richard's hand, copied out by Jono from a sheet of cartridge paper on the table by the window, the day Richard was tested.

The names were there. All seventeen. In his own square capitals.

But six of them, he saw now, reading down, he did not recognise.

He read them again. Six names. Councillors. Officers. A man at the county. He had written them down himself, five weeks ago, in his own hand. He knew he had. He could see his own capitals.

He did not know who they were.

He stood in the cellar with his pocketbook open and tried to remember a single thing about any of them. A face. A suit. A lamp. A voice in a council chamber. Nothing. The names sat on the page in his own handwriting like words in a language he had once spoken and forgotten.

He looked up at Keith.

Keith was sitting very still at the end of the desk with one hand flat on the stone in its foam cradle, looking at him, with those old eyes, the way he had looked at Rani, and at Annie, and at Basil.

"Taken out of time," said Keith quietly. "The way the grey ones go. Everything they did is still there. The money. The decisions. The forty years. Just not them." He looked down at the stone. "It costs. It always costs. That was the cost. For you, it's six names." He was quiet a moment. "For the town, it'll be more. People will wake up today in Torquay and not quite remember who used to sit in some of those chairs. And not quite mind."

Jono stood very still.

"Did you know?" he said. "Last night. That she was going to."

"Yes."

"And you didn't stop her."

"I can't stop her," said Keith. "Nobody can. That's never been how it works." He turned his cup a quarter turn on the desk. "I can

only be here afterwards. To tell somebody what it cost. So it gets written down."

Jono looked at the six names in his own handwriting that he did not know.

Then he picked up his pencil. And under them, very small, so that whoever read it after would know, he wrote:

Did not remember these on 30 Oct. Do not know who they were. Wrote them down anyway. Somebody should know they were here.

Chapter 30 – *The Up Train*

Mon. 30 Oct. 2028. Torquay station, down platform, 10.15 a.m. The up train. C.H., self, and K. at the end by the footbridge. A. at the window, third carriage. Did not wave. Never has.

Chris carried the bag.

He had never carried it. Nobody had. His mother had walked Miss Ania down the hill to the station on the last Monday in October every year since 1950, and in all that time she had never once been allowed to carry the carpet bag. *She does not need me to carry the bag*, Wendy had written, in the green exercise book, in 1965. *It is a small carpet bag and there is never much in it.*

This morning, at a quarter to ten, at the foot of the stairs at Widecombe Cot, Ania had come down from Room 3 with her bag in her hand and stopped in the hall, and looked at Chris standing by the front door in his coat, and at Jono beside him, and at Wendy in her chair by the desk with her stick across her knees, who was ninety-three and could not walk down the hill any more and had cried, last night, for the first time in Chris's memory, because of it.

And Ania had held out the bag to Chris.

He had taken it. It was very light. There was hardly anything in it at all.

They walked down the hill. The three of them. Ania in the middle, very straight, in her grey costume, no coat, with her hands at her sides. Chris on her left, with the bag. Jono on her right, in his tunic, with his lanyard, because he had a call at eleven.

It was a bright morning, cold and clear, the first proper blue sky for a week. The sea at the bottom of the hill was flat and silver.

The trees along the road had gone gold and were starting to come down.

Nobody said anything.

Chris had thought he would. He had lain awake half the night thinking of what he would say. He had heard her come in at half past twelve on Sunday night. He had heard the front door, which his mother had bolted at eleven, open and close without anybody drawing the bolt. He had heard her feet on the stairs, light and even, not hurried, and the door of Room 3.

And at seven this morning he had heard the news on the radio in the kitchen. Twenty-six people. Councillors. Officers. Former council leaders. A man from the county. Last seen at Torquay Town Hall on Sunday night. Their coats still on the hooks. A major investigation.

He had stood in the kitchen with the kettle in his hand.

He had known. On Saturday morning, in the dining room, with the sun coming up on her closed hand. *Tomorrow night I shall go out, Wendy. Late.* He had known then. He had not let himself know it all the way, and he had gone to bed on Sunday night and lain awake and not got up, and not followed her, because his mother had looked at him at ten o'clock across the kitchen table and said, *Chris. Don't*, in a voice he had not heard since he was six.

And Jono had been there. He knew that too. He had seen it on Jono's face at the front door this morning. Jono's face had the look it had had in the garden in Paignton in 1992, the colour of the sky behind him, white, with the blue showing through. Jono had seen. Jono had written it down. And Jono was never going to tell him what was on the page, and Chris was never going to ask.

He knew, and he did not know.

He walked down the hill beside her with her bag in his good hand and did not say anything at all.

* * *

Halfway down, by the bus stop where the hill turns, she spoke.

"You may stop," said Ania. "Trusting me. If you wish."

She did not look at him. She was looking at the sea at the bottom of the hill.

"You would be right to," she said. "You said so once. In Room 3. I said it to you, and you said no." Every word the same length. "I have done a thing that cannot be undone. I did it on purpose. I would do it again." She was quiet. "It would be easier, Chris. If you stopped. I would understand."

Chris walked on beside her.

He thought about it. Properly. The way he had in Room 3 in 2008, with the light on the white candlewick cover. He made himself think about it. Twenty-six coats on hooks. A green ledger in the cellar with every name gone out of it. Six names in Jono's pocketbook that Jono did not know any more.

He thought about a churchyard gate in Burslem, under a lime tree, and a woman crying before she knew he had turned round.

He thought about a woman who had stepped off the four o'clock from Newton Abbot in 1895 with no ticket, and held her tea in both hands at Bailey's, and had never once in a hundred and thirty-three years walked away from this family. Not the Hills, not the Harveys, not the Mallyons. Who had sat up on the top of Haytor at dawn in the frost with three grey things round her, keeping them, and had walked into a burning car park behind a station and said *not yet*, and had come down the stairs on Saturday morning and found a whistle on her table and closed her hand on it and held on.

He thought about his own hand, on a pen, on a Friday in Bailey's, signing a sheet of paper that said *in due course and with discretion*.

For now, Jono had said.

She had not let it be for now.

"No," said Chris.

Ania looked at him.

"My mother chose who her father was," said Chris. "In the back room. In 1965. I chose who you were. In Room 3. In 2008." He shifted the bag in his hand. "I'm choosing again."

"And?"

"The same," said Chris. "You're the same."

She looked at him for a long time, walking, with the sea in front of them going silver.

Then she looked down, at the road, at her own feet going down the hill, and something happened at the corner of her mouth. The smile from a long way off. Small. Kind. The one he had seen across the bay-window table all his life.

Not the one from the steps. Jono had told him nothing about the steps. Chris knew there had been another one.

"Thank you, Chris," said Ania.

Jono, on her other side, walked on with his hands in his pockets, and did not say anything, and Chris saw that his eyes were wet.

* * *

Torquay station. The old building, cream and maroon, the one that had not burned. The canopy over the down platform on its iron columns. The footbridge. The benches. The same platform Chris had stood on in 1965, aged three and a half, with his father, looking at a Western diesel. In 1980 with a siege carton of corned beef, and a girl running from the bus with her arms out. In 2018, getting off a

train from Paddington with a Tiger carton, with Karen at the end by the ticket office, which she did not do.

The 10.15 to Paddington was in. Six carriages, standing at the platform with its engines running.

And at the far end of the platform, by the footbridge, standing very still with his hands in his pockets, in a white shirt and a dark jacket, a young man.

Chris saw him first. He always did.

Keith had not said he was coming. Keith did not say things. He was standing at the end of the platform where the footbridge steps came down, exactly where Jono had stood ten years ago, waiting for Chris to get off the train. Looking down the platform at the three of them coming through the barrier.

Ania saw him.

She stopped.

* * *

It was only for a moment. A second. Two. In the middle of the platform at Torquay, with her hands at her sides, looking down the length of it at a young man by the footbridge. And Keith looked back at her.

Chris stood beside her with the bag and watched them look at each other.

He did not know what passed between them. He would never know. He thought, afterwards, on the walk back up the hill, that it was the look of two people who had known each other for a very long time, in a place he had never been and would only ever reach once, at the very end. A place where a very old man sat in a room at the top of a house in Torquay with a window that looked down over the bay, and wrote a list in a careful, shaky hand, and gave it to her, and sent her back.

Keith did not come down the platform. He did not lift his hand. He stood by the footbridge with his hands in his pockets and his two lamps, the near one and the far one, burning over his head in the bright cold morning, and looked at her.

Ania did not say anything to him. Not a word.

Then she turned away and went to the train.

* * *

Chris put the bag up into the carriage for her. The third carriage, a window seat facing the way the train would go. She did not need him to. She let him.

She sat down. She put her hands in her lap.

He stood on the platform by the open door. Jono beside him.

"October," said Chris.

"Yes," said Ania. "I always do."

"I'll bring your toast."

"I will not eat it."

"I know," said Chris.

She looked at him through the open door. Then past him, at Jono. Then, for a moment, down the platform, at the young man by the footbridge.

Then back at Chris.

"Look after Wendy," she said. "She has always waited up."

The guard blew his whistle. A real one, metal, a policeman's sort of whistle, shrill. Every dog in Torquay, Chris thought, would have heard that one. He found that he was glad of it.

The doors closed.

* * *

The train went.

Slowly, the way they do at Torquay, out from under the canopy, out into the sun, along the platform. Chris walked beside her window for a few yards, the way his mother had for seventy-eight years, the way a girl from Brixham had once run beside his own window at this platform in 1980 with her arms out. Ania sat very straight in her seat with her hands in her lap and looked out at him.

She did not wave. She never had.

The train went past the end of the platform. Past the footbridge. Past the young man standing at the foot of the steps with his hands in his pockets, who did not wave either.

And up the line. North. Towards Newton Abbot, and the moor, and Exeter, and London, and wherever it was she went on the last Monday of October when the train had gone out of sight. Nobody had ever known. Nobody had ever asked.

It went round the curve and was gone.

Chris stood at the edge of the platform with his good hand empty. He had carried the bag. He had never carried it before. He did not know what to do with the hand now.

Jono put his own hand on Chris's shoulder. Very briefly. The way Johnny Hills had, at a level crossing in Paignton, in 1968.

When they turned round, the end of the platform by the footbridge was empty.

* * *

Keith did not go up the head that night.

He knew it was the night. He had known since the platform. He had known, if he was honest, for twenty-nine years, since a room at the top of a house in Torquay in 2057 where he had sat with

a pen and written a list in his own old man's hand, six names and six terms, and given it to her.

And under the last line, he had left a space. He had not been able to write it. He had not known what to put. She had written it herself, in 2018, in Room 3, in her own small regular hand. He had not seen it. He knew what it said.

He did not go up the head. That was not his. That had never been his.

He walked. From the station, round the bay, all afternoon and into the dark. Along the sea front at Torquay. Past the Grand and the Abbey and Livermead, the way the trams had gone in 1895. Through Preston. Into Paignton. Into Station Square, at about nine o'clock, with the burnt shell of the station on one side and Bailey's on the corner and the forge across the way with its doors open and its fire going.

He sat down on a bench by the bus shelter. On his own.

Fred was at the forge. Banking the fire for the night, in his leather apron, with Biscuit lying across the doorstep. Biscuit was not shaking. Biscuit had his head up, and was looking out at the dark square, and was not afraid of it. Every dog in Torbay, since midnight on Sunday, had stopped being afraid of the dark.

Keith sat on the bench and watched the forge, and thought about what he had done to get back to this night.

A kiss in the back room at Bailey's, with a green ledger on the table and a woman's hands on his face, and a song coming through two walls. A kiss in a cellar with a woman's hand on the back of his neck and her hair wet from the rain. He had not stopped either of them. He had known both of them were coming, for twenty-nine years, from the list in the other direction, and he had let them come, and stood still, and shut his eyes.

He had told himself it was because he could not stop things. A nudge, not a hand. Because if he stopped them it would cost something he could not spare.

That was true.

It was not the only thing that was true.

He sat on the bench in Station Square and knew that one day, in a room at the top of a house that did not exist yet, somebody would ask him to account for both of them. And that he would. And that it would cost what it cost.

Across the square, Fred pulled the big doors of the forge shut. The light went. The hammer had stopped.

Keith sat on the bench in the dark, alone, with his hands in his pockets.

Somewhere above him, past the lamps, past the roofs, very high, nothing moved round the sky that should not.

* * *

At twenty to twelve, Jono was driving home from a late call in Brixham.

An old man on the hill above the harbour who could not sleep and had rung the agency because his wife had died in September and the house was too quiet. Jono had sat with him for an hour and a half, and made him cocoa, and listened to him talk about the boats, and written down the man's wife's name, which was Joan, because nobody else was going to.

He came out of Brixham on the Berry Head road, because it was quicker at night, and slowed at the turning for the head, the way he always did, out of habit, the way you slow at a level crossing.

He looked up the lane.

At the top of it, where the lane came out onto the car park on the head, under the moon, in the far corner, where the tarmac ran out and the grass went on a little way beyond the low wall and then there was nothing but sea, there was a car.

A little blue Fiesta. Parked. Nose to the sea.

In the place.

Jono slowed right down. Nearly stopped.

The lighthouse was turning out at the end of the head. The long white arm of light came out over the sea, and round, and went over the car park, and over the little blue car in the corner.

Two people in it.

He could see them. Just. Two heads, in the front seats. Close. Very close. Not moving.

And the windows of the car, in the moonlight, in the cold, were beginning to mist. From the bottom up.

Jono did not stop.

He drove on. Slowly. Past the turning. Down the hill. Towards Paignton, and Preston, and home.

At the lay-by at the bottom of the hill, he pulled in, and turned the engine off, and took out his pocketbook, and wrote it down by the light of the dashboard. The date. The time. The place. What he saw. Not what he felt.

Mon. 30 Oct. 11.40 p.m. Berry Head turning. K.'s car in the place. Two in it. Drove on.

He looked at it for a long time.

He did not write anything else. He did not need to. He did not underline it. Hills did not underline.

He put the elastic round the pocketbook and put it in his inside pocket, and started the car, and drove home.

He would never tell anybody what was on that page. He would never tell anybody what was on the page before it either, from a Saturday night at Bailey's in September, or the one from the steps of the Town Hall on Sunday night. He had written them down. That was all that was ever asked of him. Somebody would read them one day, at a kitchen table, a long time from now, and know what they meant.

That was enough.

* * *

On the head, in the place, the lighthouse went round.

The long white arm of it came out over the sea, and round, over the black water and the white line of surf at the foot of the cliffs, and over the grass, and over the low wall, and over the little blue car in the corner of the car park with its nose to the sea, and went on.

Round, and light, and dark.

Inside the car, the windows had misted all the way up now, from the bottom to the top, so that the beam, when it came round, lit them silver and soft, and you could not see in.

Two people in it. A man of sixty-six with a bad hand and grey hair, and a woman of sixty-seven in a big jumper with the sleeves rolled up four times. In the front seats of a car her daughter called the bathtub, on top of Berry Head, in the place, at midnight, in October. The first time since 1980.

Nobody else in the world knew they were there. Except a Hills, who had driven on. And a woman on a train going north, who had known for a hundred and thirty-three years, and had written one

word on a list, in a small regular hand, every letter the same height, like print, beside a name that was crossed through.

His.

The lighthouse went round.

It had always counted itself. Tonight, for the first time in forty-eight years, there were two people in that car, in that place, under that light.

And neither of them was counting.